



The Myth and Reality of
LEWIS CARROLL

KAROLINE LEACH

Praise for IN THE SHADOW OF THE DREAM CHILD

‘At last a book with something different and surprising to say about Lewis Carroll.’ – *Daily Mail*

‘Persuasive ... Leach makes a good case.’ – *Daily Telegraph*

‘After Karoline Leach’s book Carroll studies can never be quite the same again ... it should certainly be read by anyone concerned with Dodgson’s life and work.’ – *Lewis Carroll Review*

‘We are nearer now than before, I think, to the man who wrote Alice.’ – David McKie, *Guardian*

‘Now we have the whole truth with an intelligent advocate. Karoline Leach’s achievement is considerable, and it cannot be ignored.’ – Geoffrey Heptonstall, *Contemporary Review*

‘It is clear that he was neither saint nor pervert. I welcome this work of reassessment, though it is by no means a whitewash, and I believe that many lovers of Carroll will be similarly relieved.’ – Patrick Skene Catling, *Spectator*

IN THE SHADOW OF THE DREAMCHILD

Lewis Carroll's classic novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* remains as popular today as it has ever been, and it is remarkable to realize that it was first published in 1865. Since then it and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass*, and *What Alice Found There* have remained two of the best-loved children's books in the world.

Yet the man behind the pseudonym, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, has become a controversial figure, with many believing that he had an unhealthy emotional and probably sexual interest in little girls, including his 'muse' Alice Liddell. Karoline Leach, however, argues that previous biography has fallen victim to a mythology that obscures the reality of the writer's life. She explains how the famous but fictitious image of the socially inept and eccentric Carroll grew in the popular imagination and describes how she discovered evidence from the family archives and scrutinized letters and unpublished diaries to reveal that he was actually a charming if manipulative man who enjoyed unfettered relationships with adult women that sometimes brought him into conflict with his Victorian world.

At the time of its first publication this book caused great controversy, but in the years since then it has become recognized as a landmark study that has changed forever the way we regard the creator of Alice.

KAROLINE LEACH has written for the theatre since the early 1990s, with her play *The Mysterious Mr Love* being staged to critical acclaim in the Comedy Theatre, London, in 1997. Her play *Tryst* opened Off-Broadway in 2006 and has since been performed in numerous venues in North America and Europe. *In the Shadow of the Dreamchild* is her first book.

IN THE SHADOW OF
THE DREAMCHILD

The Myth and Reality of Lewis Carroll

Karoline Leach



PETER OWEN
London and Chicago

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Second Edition

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He was the last saint of this irreverent world; those who have surrendered the myths of Santa Claus, of the stork, of Jehovah hang their last remnants of mysticism on Lewis Carroll and will not allow themselves to examine him dispassionately.

– Florence Becker Lennon

Introduction

CHARLES Dodgson was born on 27 January 1832. He lived his life and eventually died on 14 January 1898.

Lewis Carroll was born on 1 March 1856 and is still very much alive.

The hundred years of scholarship surrounding the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* has, the evidence suggests, been largely concerned with the second rather than the first of these two incarnations. It has been devoted primarily to a potent mythology surrounding the name 'Lewis Carroll' rather than the reality of the man, Dodgson. The evidence for this is – as you shall see – everywhere; the reasons seem only partly explicable in rational terms.

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This was the somewhat challenging opening to the first edition of this book, nine years ago. The publication of this new, revised and extended edition is a good moment to pause and reflect on things. Those words were written at a time when the modern 'official' portrait of Lewis Carroll had never been seriously challenged and, indeed, when it seemed unthinkable for it to be so. It was a portrait of a Victorian clergyman, shy and prim, and locked to some degree in perpetual childhood. A Janus who stumbled into genius through psychological fragmentation. A man who 'had no life', who lived apart from the world and apart from normal human contact, who was monkish and chaste and who 'died a virgin'.¹ Perhaps, above all else, it is a portrait of a man emotionally focused on pre-pubescent female children; a man who sought comfort and companionship exclusively through serial friendships with 'little girls' and who almost invariably lost interest in them when they reached puberty. His emotional life is usually presented as an ultimately sterile and lonely series of 'repeated rejections', as the little ones grew up and inevitably left him behind. Since Freudian analysis plucked out the heart of his mystery sixty years ago, and found it cankered, this obsession has been seen by many as evidence of a repressed and deviant sexuality, and Carroll

has been described as a man who struggled to master his ‘differing sexual appetites’. To the popular press and the popular mind he is seen as a paedophile. To distinguished scholars he is a man who ‘desired the companionship of female children.’² The axiom upon which the entire analysis of Carroll’s life and literature depends is the assumption that the girl-child was more or less the single outlet for his emotional and creative energies in an otherwise lonely and isolated life. That she was the sole inspiration for his genius; that she inhabited the place in his heart, occupied in more normal lives by adult friends and by lovers. This belief, and its corollaries – his loneliness and his unassailable chastity – were, at the time of this book’s first appearance, the assumptions by which everything else about Carroll was evaluated.

Back then I asked was it – any of it – true? At the time it seemed almost a silly question – as indeed many Carroll experts were not slow to remark. But once we dared to ask it interesting things began to be uncovered.

It was a chance discovery that I made in 1996 that started me posing this question. I was visiting the Dodgson archive, doing a little background research for a projected screenplay, when I saw an item listed in the catalogue as ‘cut pages in diary’. I knew that the pages missing from Dodgson’s diaries (presumed to have been removed by his relatives after his death) were a central question and that one of them in particular – that of 27 June 1863 – was believed to have held the key to the puzzle of what happened to put an end to the friendship between Dodgson and Alice Liddell, the ‘real Alice’ as she is usually called. Biographers wrote about this particular lost page as if it were crucial; it seemed to span a period when his friendship with the Liddell family came to an abrupt and unexplained end, and most speculated that what had been written there was an admission that Dodgson had proposed marriage to the eleven-year old Alice and thus caused himself to be banned from her presence by her outraged family.

I knew the question had been extensively explored and that biographers had been deploring the lack of any firm evidence for years. So when I saw the document listed as ‘cut pages in diary’ I didn’t think there was any likelihood of it being anything meaningful; after all, the Dodgson archive had been extensively catalogued and reviewed, so how could anything

crucial on such an important topic possibly have been missed? I asked to see it more out of a sense of duty than with any idea it would mean anything.

The document was delivered to the table in the little reading-room – and I looked at it, at first blankly but then with growing amazement. For what I was looking at was a small piece of handwritten paper headed ‘cut pages in diary’, which contained, among other things, a summary of the contents of *the* missing page; the one for 27 June 1863. Written there on the little torn document in front of me, in the hand of one of Dodgson’s nieces who had been the guardians of his estate, was a brief two-sentence summary of what had actually happened to bring his association with the Liddell family to a sudden close.³

I was very much surprised. I had never heard of any reference to this document before. It seemed to be entirely unknown; but it seemed impossible that something so potentially important could have been catalogued in the archive and yet never seen by any researcher or biographer. I assumed I must be mistaken, so as soon as I could I took the document to the man who was editing Dodgson’s diaries for publication, Edward Wakeling. He was, if possible, even more astonished than I had been. He confirmed the paper was genuine and had never been published and that he had never seen nor heard of it before. He urged that it ought to be written up and published immediately, and so I ventured quite nervously into print on the subject of Lewis Carroll for the first time. The ‘find’ was published in the *Times Literary Supplement* a few weeks later,⁴ but the potential meaning of the episode was only just starting to make itself known.

It was obvious to everyone that there were several considerations about the ‘cut pages in diary’ document that seemed to require a shift in perspective. The most obvious was that the story it told about what happened on that day in June 1863 seemed to be nothing like the numerous assumptions made about it in the biographies; there was no mention of a marriage proposal to Alice Liddell, indeed no mention of Alice at all. What seemed to have happened was that Mrs Liddell told Dodgson to stay away for a while because she was worried about gossip that was circulating linking him with the family governess and ‘Ina’, the name of her older daughter. This, of itself, implied that there was on this point some distance between the assumed biographical ‘truth’ and Dodgson’s experiential reality.

The second – and perhaps far more curious – factor was the question of how this document, which seemed to shed unique light on one of the most famous mysteries of Dodgson's life, had managed to sit – labelled and catalogued – in a public archive for at least fifteen years without any biographer or researcher noticing it was there. Why hadn't any of those authors who had been speculating keenly on what the missing page probably contained found this document themselves? Was it in any way connected with the fact that this paper told a story so different from the one expected?

It was in pursuit of some answers to this that I wrote the first edition of this book, and the projected screenplay about Carroll turned into a major reassessment – not so much of his life but of the biographical process, and the human mindset we all share, that created 'Carroll' in the first place. I have been credited by some, as a result, with rediscovering Dodgson, but I do not think there's much credit in this. I think it is harder to find 'Carroll' than it is Dodgson. 'Carroll' has only ever existed in that special place where faith lives, and you need to be a certain kind of believer actually to see him; Dodgson is right there as soon as you open his diary or read his letters; right there, being searingly self-critical or horribly pompous, brilliant or obtuse, insightful or self-deceptive, overwhelmingly generous or pettily critical, lovingly flirtatious or hatefully cruel.

It is not very difficult to see that the man who emerges from his own letters and diaries is not 'Carroll'. He does not resonate as a man with 'no life', nor as a shy asexual recluse, loathing little boys, obsessed with little girls and unable to function in an adult world. Actually, there seems to be nothing to suggest he ever hated boys or men; he enjoyed several important men and boy-friendships in his life, although his preferred companions were, of course, always female. His few little comments on 'liking children – except boys'⁵ seem obviously to be jokes taken out of context by a posterity with only a rudimentary idea of what humour might be. And, despite frequent self-caricature as a 'hermit', and despite its frequent repetition in biography, he was quite obviously never any kind of recluse. On the contrary, he was almost addicted to company – again, particularly female company – and he never had any shortage of this in his life. Sometimes he almost seems obsessively driven to socialize, hurrying about London visiting artists and writers and business associates, and his innumerable female friends, making

more than half-a-dozen calls a day and fitting in theatre visits and invitations to dine in between.

The same applies, to an even greater extent, to the most controversial area of Dodgson's life: the belief that he gave his love and attention exclusively to pre-pubescent girl children and that he abandoned all these friendships when the girls reached fourteen. Again, it isn't hard at all to discover that the life recorded in his diaries and his letters does not seem to follow this pattern at all. It was unquestionably Dodgson who invented the now famous term 'child-friend', but, with typical elusiveness, he seems to have chosen to use it in a peculiarly personal, almost deliberately misleading way. For Dodgson a 'child-friend' was any female of almost any age – at least under forty – with whom he enjoyed a relationship of a special kind of closeness. Some, indeed, were little girls, some began as such but grew up and were still 'child-friends' at twenty or thirty; some were given the name even though their relationship with Dodgson began when they were young women. A little girl of ten and a married woman of thirty-five, a child he met once at the beach and a woman he shared intimate exchanges with for twenty years or more might equally be termed 'child-friends' by Dodgson. And, far from losing interest in girls when they reached puberty, a simple check of their birth dates can show that at any one time a substantial proportion – anything from 30 to 90 per cent – of his 'child-friends' would seem to have been already at or well beyond this watershed. There were married women like Constance Burch, widows, including Edith Shute and Sarah Blakemore, and single girls such as Theo Heaphy, May Miller and 'darling Isa' Bowman. Many of these relationships were evidently very intimate and important to him; indeed, he defied the conventions of his society in order to maintain them. Some of them seem 'sexualized' or romanticized, possessive and jealous. There is nothing to stipulate that any of them were actually physically sexual or consummated, but nothing, either, to rule it out. He was apparently gossiped about in consequence of these friendships, his social life, his photography, all the source of nagging rumour. The gossip I have found to be recorded involves not children but these women-friends, and it was this – not his love for children – that seems to have dogged and worried him. Intermittently 'Mrs Grundy' became his personal Torquemada, tut-tutting at his heels as he walked his women-

friends through polite society; whispering and hinting and rumourmongering behind his back.

So, in fact, beyond the familiar story of ‘little girls’, primness, virginity and reclusive weirdness his documented life seems rich, adult, replete with evidence of broad-mindedness, ambiguity and tolerance. The only puzzle is – why had no one ever really noticed this before?

You can find some immediate answers. Charles Dodgson’s family’s incursive destruction of his papers immediately after his death, and their steady refusal to allow evidence to be made public, meant that the first-hand biographical evidence remained almost non-existent until the second half of the twentieth century. In a separate but ultimately linked development, a massive and almost irresistible myth surrounding the name ‘Lewis Carroll’ seems to have begun to develop even while Dodgson still lived. When early biographers wrote their studies of Lewis Carroll, lacking almost all first-hand evidence, they had little choice but to fill their books with the stuff of this myth. And thus very early on it became dignified by an apparent scholastic pedigree. Later biographers took their lead and repeated these supposedly already verified ‘facts’.

But I am not really sure this explains the phenomenon of ‘Carroll’ adequately. It does not really tell us why the mythic image grew as it did, or why it seemed to resonate and become so meaningful in so many people’s lives, or why it continued to be upheld long after the documentary evidence had become available. It does not tell us why so many respectable, honest people who had known Dodgson began to restructure their own memories in provably erroneous ways or why people who wrote about him seemed to be hostage to an agenda they themselves barely understood, to remove everything adult, introspective or even slightly meaningful, in a mature sense, from the man’s biography. It does not easily explain how a biographer could look at a poem Dodgson wrote about sexual love and claim that it showed how Dodgson never wrote about sexual love, or how a good scholar could not see a piece of paper in a catalogued archive that answered a mystery he was researching – but in a way very different from anything he expected. And it does not tell us how so many good writers could contrive to remain unaware of the details of fact that would have shipwrecked the conclusions they were drawing.

Things have moved on since the first edition, and it is now a little more possible to consider alternative interpretations in Carroll's biography. Indeed, a whole new branch of study devoted to the 'Carroll myth' has emerged and is flourishing. This revised and expanded edition takes account of this. It devotes rather less space to arguing for new interpretations (others are doing that very successfully) and rather more to looking at how the myth developed in the first place. In many ways it is more interesting than anything Dodgson ever did, and I suspect that he, with his love of the bizarre, would be the first to agree with that. The factual details of Dodgson's life might yield a new understanding of him, but they are not the solution to our intense, puzzling relationship with the man who gave us *Alice*, which will, I am sure, mean we continue to spin myths about him – although maybe different ones – for as long as his work is alive in us. The solution to that puzzle lies, if anywhere, in trying to understand how so many people were clever and inventive enough to be able to look at Dodgson, human, frail, sensual, real, and see 'Carroll', ethereal, spiritual and 'other'. That is the truly surprising achievement. It is in the dreams and madnesses of storytellers like Langford Reed, with his images of a man who could only handle adult women by mail, in the agenda-heavy avoidance of such men as Roger Lancelyn Green, who was happy to put his reputation on the line and 'edit' a complete diary he wasn't even allowed to see, in the inspired allusiveness of academics like Morton Cohen, who believed he found 'plenty' when there was famine, that we might find the solution to the phenomenon of 'Carroll'. In the gap between what was there and what the biographers and memoirists and literary critics and psychoanalysts managed to 'see' is the story of our real relationship with Carroll and Alice.

So, if you can forgive it, this revised exploration is not primarily about Charles Lutwidge Dodgson at all; it is about trying to understand how we came to lose him.

Charles Dodgson: A Biographical Sketch

THE family Lewis Carroll was born into was predominantly northern English with Irish connections. Conservative, Anglican, High Church, upper-middle class and inclining towards the two good old upper-middle-class professions of the Army and the Church, its members had a tendency to marry their cousins, making their family trees unintelligible and modern psychoanalysts inclined to talk in Malthusian terms of the dangers of interbreeding.

For generations the family hovered on the edges of history without achieving anything very remarkable. A distant progenitor of Lewis Carroll's had managed to become a bishop and had persuaded someone to publish his sermons; worthy ancestry but dull, although closer antecedents were more dashing. Lewis Carroll's grandfather (another Charles), his father's father, had been an army captain, killed most romantically in action while his two sons were hardly more than babies.

The elder of these – yet another Charles – grew up a serious-minded sort of person with no inclination to meddle with the army. He reverted to the other family business and took holy orders. He went to Westminster School and thence to Oxford. He was mathematically brilliant, won an astonishing double first and ought to have distinguished himself in later life but somehow did not. With casual misogyny this has been blamed on his acquisition of a wife and several children, although what precise limitation this laid upon his intellectual powers is never discussed. His marriage may have required him to leave his post at his college, but some of his contemporaries managed to combine intellectual distinction with the presence of a woman in their lives, so perhaps his failure owed more to some personal inadequacy. Whatever the reason, he became a parson, married his cousin, had children and seemingly transferred his ambitions to his eldest son.

This boy, Charles Lutwidge, 'Lewis Carroll' as he became, was born on 27 January 1832. His parents had been married for four years and had

already produced two girls (the Dodgsons were never backward in fulfilling their godly duty in the marriage bed – as elsewhere), so his advent must have been a source of pride to the father. He was born in the little parsonage of Daresbury in Cheshire, where Father was earning a less than satisfactory living and writing complaining letters about his want of fortune. His mother, Frances Jane Lutwidge, was twenty-nine and to history a figure as shadowy as the silhouette that is the only remaining likeness of her. Her kindness and her love for her children radiate from her extant letters. Anything else is a mystery. Perhaps there was nothing else. Perhaps she succeeded too well in being a woman of her time and living entirely through other people.

She produced children with awesome regularity; eleven in eighteen years, and, incredibly for the time, all of them, seven girls and four boys, survived into adulthood. By the time Charles was eighteen months old she was imminently expecting again, and she continued to deliver a baby every eighteen months on average, until either her husband's determination or her ovaries gave out and allowed her body a little time to itself.

Internally complex marital histories, as well as the irrepressible fertility of the family, meant that in addition to his ten siblings Charles grew up in the midst of a vast interconnection of variously related Dodgsons, Wilcoxes and Lutwidges, all marrying and spawning at a truly awesome rate. Any attempt to identify his cousins individually, who all seem to have been baptized from an available shortlist of about five names, is probably more trouble than it is worth.

When he was eleven his father's complaining letters to his superiors at last produced results and he was given the more lucrative and rewarding living of Croft-on-Tees in north Yorkshire. The whole family moved to the spacious rectory, and this remained their home for the next twenty-five years. Dodgson senior made some progress through the ranks of the Church, although he was never in any danger of being described as meteoric in his rise. He published some sermons, translated Tertullian, became an Archdeacon of Ripon Cathedral and involved himself, sometimes influentially, in the intense religious disputes that were dividing the Anglican Church. He was High Church, inclining to Anglo-Catholicism, an admirer of Newman and the Tractarian movement, and he did his best to instil such views in his children.

Young Charles grew out of infancy into a bright, articulate boy who had inherited an unexpected physical attractiveness as well as all his father's academic ability. The spark of a lighter, brighter personality ignited this into a brilliance that was obvious from a tender age. Stuart Collingwood told family stories of his uncle's legendary precocity: 'One day, when Charles was a very small boy, he came up to his father and showed him a book of logarithms, with the request, "please explain". Mr Dodgson told him that he was much too young to understand anything about such a difficult subject. The child listened to what his father said, and appeared to consider it irrelevant, for he still insisted, "But, please, explain!"' Unfortunately he does not say whether Dodgson senior obliged or told the wayward infant to mind his manners.¹

In the early years young Charles was educated at home by his mother. His reading lists preserved by the family attest to a precocious intellect. At the age of seven the child was reading *The Pilgrim's Progress*. At the age of twelve he began the business of following in his father's academic footsteps. He was sent away to school at Richmond as a boarder. The fragmentary evidence remaining suggests that he was happy and settled. He retained fond memories of his headmaster, Dr James Tate, who was evidently an intelligent and sensitive man, very aware that young Dodgson was an unusually able child. When Charles was thirteen Tate wrote a warm letter to his father opining that the boy possessed, 'along with other and excellent natural endowments':

a very uncommon share of genius. Gentle and cheerful in his intercourse with others, playful and ready in conversation, he is capable of acquirements and knowledge far beyond his years, while his reason is so clear and so jealous of error, that he will not rest satisfied without a most exact solution of whatever appears to him obscure ... You may fairly anticipate for him a bright career.²

We can be sure that the Archdeacon did. He was not to know that his notions of a 'bright career' and his son's would be irreconcilably different.

A few months after this the young Dodgson moved on to Rugby – the place Thomas Hughes has made famous and infamous in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. English public schools of the time were not places for the sensitive. The awful Flashman might have been a creature of fiction, but he

had plenty of real-life counterparts. Bullying, often of an unbelievably brutal kind, was endemic. Dodgson with his pretty-boy looks, his curls and his easy intellectual superiority would have been an obvious target. He was physically competent enough to defend himself up to a point; he was not the anaemic bookworm of legend. At Richmond he recorded with equanimity that the favourite games were, among other things, 'football and fighting', and even Collingwood, who set out virtually to canonize the subject of his book, had to admit that he was a worldly enough boy to get into fights, although naturally 'in defence of a righteous cause'.³

But even though Dodgson could hit back when he needed to he was bullied at Rugby, and in later years he looked back on his time there with unmixed distaste. 'I cannot say', he wrote as a young man, 'that any earthly considerations would induce me to go through my three years again.'⁴

More explicitly, he confided in a later volume of his diary: 'From my own experience of school life at Rugby I can honestly say that if I could have been ... secure from annoyance at night, the hardships of the daily life would have been comparative trifles to bear.'⁵

The nature of this nocturnal 'annoyance' will probably never now be fully understood, but it was evidently unusually severe or remarkable in some way, and it may be that he is delicately referring to some form of sexual abuse. Such experiences were fairly widespread at that time, and the cult of muffled homo-eroticism that was to be found in so many male-dominated nineteenth-century institutions was to a certain extent endemic. Pretty younger boys were often the targets of experimentation by the older post-pubescent pupils. A near contemporary of Dodgson's, Augustus Hare, left his own account of what night-time in the school dormitory meant to him: 'The first night I was there, at nine years old, I was compelled to eat Eve's apple quite up – indeed, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was stripped absolutely bare: there was no fruit left to gather.'⁶

Whether Dodgson's night-time 'annoyance' in those open dormitories at Rugby was as shatteringly invasive as this, or some lesser thing, it left its mark. Regrettably for our understanding of his development, we know no more than that.

Whatever the extent of his negative experience he excelled scholastically and with apparent ease. It was rare for a term to end without 'Charlie'

bringing home a school prize. 'I have not had a more promising boy his age since I came to Rugby,' observed R.B. Mayor, the mathematics master, while the headmaster, A.C. Tait, enthused: 'His mathematical knowledge is great for his age, and I do not doubt he will do himself credit in the classics. His examination for the Divinity prize was one of the most creditable exhibitions I have seen.'⁷

At this age achievement came easily, perhaps a little too easily. He never needed to acquire the discipline of steady application in order to get reward. In later years, when he tried to become a lecturer, he would pay the price. It would mean that academia, which is all about steady application, would never be quite congenial for him. He would be bored, he would be restless and always trying to compensate for shirking his work.

In the summer of 1848 whooping cough invaded the Dodgson household, and Charles's small brothers and sisters suffered it 'decidedly'. On vacation from Rugby he was called on to help his mother in the nursing tasks and spent his summer 'constantly nursing and playing with the little ones'.⁸ It was not until the following March that he succumbed to the infection himself. Away at school and vulnerable, it must have laid him low, for his mother could not report his recovery until July, and the long-term effects on his health may have been considerable. The deafness already affecting his right ear became worse, and his chest may have suffered permanent weakening.

When he was nineteen he took the next step along the road so clearly marked out for him and went up to Oxford, to his father's old college, Christ Church. His first weeks after taking up residence were made terrible for him by an unexpected event. He had only been at Oxford two days when he received a summons home. His mother was dead. 'Inflammation of the Brain' – perhaps meningitis or a stroke – had killed her almost instantly; she was just forty-seven years old and her youngest child was four.⁹

So little is known about her that the impact of her death is difficult to assess. But it must have left a gaping hole in the lives of her children, for they had lost their only source of unconditional love, and we can guess that it was doubly shocking for young Charles, already negotiating the insecurity of a new life far from home, but there are few clues to be found in his surviving writings.

From a lifetime of correspondence and diary-keeping only one direct comment about his mother survives, and that is in a letter to his sister Mary from many years later, written to congratulate her on the birth of her first child in 1870: 'God bless you and the little one now entrusted to you – and may you be to him what our own dear mother was to her eldest son! I can hardly utter for your boy a better wish than that!'¹⁰ Not much perhaps in forty-seven years, but it would be absurd to attribute the absence of comment to an absence of feeling. In later years Dodgson's work contained repeated references to the almost talismanic power of mother-love, and he was sixty years old when he wrote of 'Hands, stark and still, on a dead mother's breast, / That never more shall render clasp for clasp' in his dedicatory poem to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, yet the lines have a rawness suggestive of vividly remembered pain. He knew what a mother's love could be and how it could be missed. That is all we can say.¹¹

Frances's place in the home was taken over by her younger sister. 'Aunt Lucy' would preside over her brother-in-law's household and mother his children for most of the next thirty years.

Whatever Dodgson's feelings may have been about this death he did not allow them to distract him too much from his purpose at Oxford. He may not always have worked hard, but he was exceptionally gifted, and achievement came easily to him. The following year he achieved a first in Honour Moderations and soon after was nominated to a studentship (the Christ Church equivalent of a fellowship) by his father's old friend Canon Edward Pusey. He was to remain a Student at Christ Church for the rest of his life.

The young adult Charles Dodgson was about six foot tall, slender and handsome in a soft-focused, dreamy sort of way, with curling brown hair and blue eyes. Apart from his weakened chest and hearing the only defect he carried into adulthood was what he referred to as his 'hesitation' – a stammer he had acquired in early childhood and which was to plague him throughout his entire life. It is part of the mythology that Carroll only stammered in adult company and was fluent with children, but there is nothing to support this idea. Many children of his acquaintance remembered the stammer; many adults failed to notice it. It came and went for its own reasons but almost certainly not as a simplistic manifestation of

fear of the adult world. Dodgson himself seems to have been far more acutely aware of it than most people he met. But although his stammer troubled him – even obsessed him sometimes – it was never bad enough to stop him using his other qualities to do well in society.

He was naturally gregarious, egoistic enough to relish attention and admiration. At a time when people devised their own amusements, when singing and recitation were required social skills, this youth was well equipped as an engaging entertainer. He could sing tolerably well and was not afraid to do so in front of an audience. He was adept at mimicry and story-telling. He was something of a star at charades. He could be charming, pushy, manipulative, with the kind of ready sensitivity that girls and women of a certain kind are apt to find irresistible. There are brief hints at a soaring sense of the spiritual and the divine; small moments that reveal a rich and intensely lived inner life. ‘That is a wild and beautiful bit of poetry, the song of “call the cattle home”’, he suddenly observed, in the midst of an analysis of Kingsley’s novel *Alton Locke*: ‘I remember hearing it sung at Albrighton: I wonder if any one there could have entered into the spirit of Alton Locke. I think not. I think the character of most that I meet is merely refined animal ... How few seem to care for the only subjects of real interest in life.’¹²

His early academic career veered between high-octane promise and irresistible distraction. Through his own laziness he failed an important scholarship, but still his clear brilliance as a mathematician won him the Christ Church Mathematical Lectureship, which he continued to hold for the next twenty-six years. It was a job he did for the money alone, having little enjoyment in his work. His scholastic career was only a stop-gap to other more exciting attainments that he wanted hungrily. His real ambitions lay outside academia. He wanted to be a writer.

From earliest adolescence, if not before, he was writing – poetry, short stories, for his family magazines – and by the mid-1850s he was sending his work to various magazines and already enjoying moderate success. Between 1854 and 1856 his work appeared in the national publications *The Comic Times* and *The Train* as well as smaller magazines like the *Whitby Gazette* and the *Oxford Critic*. Most of his output was comic, sometimes sharply satirical. But his standards and his ambitions were exacting. ‘I do not think I have yet written anything worthy of real publication (in which I do not

include the *Whitby Gazette* or the *Oxonian Advertiser*), but I do not despair of doing so some day,' he wrote in July 1855.¹³ Years before *Alice* he was thinking up ideas for children's books that would make money: 'Christmas book [that would] sell well ... Practical hints for constructing Marionettes and a theatre.'¹⁴ His ideas got better as he got older, but the canny mind, with an eye to income, was always there.

In addition, he never had any shortage of other interests to distract him. He loved the theatre and the arts in general, and the happiest times of his young life were spent away from Oxford enjoying the artistic pleasures of London. Then, in 1856, he took up the new art form of photography. He excelled at it, and it became an expression of his very personal inner philosophy; a belief in the divinity of what he called 'beauty', by which he seemed to mean a state of moral or aesthetic or physical perfection. This, along with his lifelong passion for the theatre, was to bring him into confrontation with the moral majority of his day and his own family's High Church beliefs.

According to his biographer and nephew Stuart Collingwood, young Charles began to keep a diary almost as soon as he could write, and he apparently kept it regularly, as Collingwood says there was only one notable gap – for the three years that Dodgson was at Rugby School. Strangely, all record of these very early diaries seems to have vanished. However, in about 1853 Dodgson began a new series of numbered diary volumes, which he continued to keep until his death, and most of these do survive, although even here the record is not complete. Some time after his death members of his family deliberately cut out and destroyed certain pages, while four of the thirteen volumes, including two consecutive ones covering the years 1858–62, went missing and have never been recovered.

The fate of these volumes and the reasons why his descendants took scissors and razor to his life's record are just some of the many mysteries and anomalies that surround the man who was 'Lewis Carroll'. Most of this missing material dates from a single decade (between 1853 and 1863), and is so extensive that it amounts to five and a half years of missing time. Over half the record for a single ten-year period of Dodgson's life is thus missing, and we currently have no firm idea why. The loss of this material means that there is very little information about what he was doing or thinking during

this very important and formative time. The story is fragmentary, and there is more unknown than there is known.

In 1856 he published his first piece of work under the name that would make him famous. A very predictable little romantic poem called 'Solitude' appeared in the periodical *The Train* under the authorship of 'Lewis Carroll'.

In the same year Christ Church acquired a new Dean (head of college) when Thomas Gaisford died and was replaced by one Henry George Liddell, who brought with him a young wife and children, all of whom would figure largely in Dodgson's life over the following years. Dodgson quite quickly became close friends with the mother and the children. They were a beautiful family. The mother, Lorina, was a 'beauty of the Spanish type', and her children had inherited her dark comeliness, which was exactly the kind Dodgson liked to photograph. He made many studies of the family, especially his three favourites, the sisters Ina, Alice and Edith. Although the diaries covering the period of the developing friendship are now missing, it appears that his friendship with the family blossomed, and there became something of a tradition of his taking the children out on the river for picnics at Godstow or Nuneham.

It was on one such expedition, in 1862, that Dodgson invented the outline of the story that eventually became his first and largest commercial success – the first *Alice* book. Having told the story and been begged by Alice Liddell to write it down, Dodgson was evidently struck by its potential to sell well. He took the manuscript to Macmillan the publisher who liked it immediately. Bravely, or crazily, Dodgson undertook to pay for the cost of publication himself in return for 90 per cent of the royalties. Even though his income was well above the national average at £500 per annum, this was still a considerable risk. In the end the gamble was to pay off, and by the end of his life the two *Alice* books had grossed him approximately £50,000.

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was published in 1865 under the penname Dodgson had first used some nine years earlier – Lewis Carroll.

With the launch and immediate phenomenal success of *Alice*, the story of the author's life becomes effectively divided in two: the continuing story of Dodgson's real life and the evolving myth surrounding 'Lewis Carroll'.

The bare facts of Carroll/Dodgson's last thirty years are clear enough. Although apparently attractive to women, he never married, and his

emotional and sexual life is the aspect of his biography most enshrouded in controversy, misunderstanding, myth and mystery. Several twentieth-century biographers developed the idea that he wanted to marry Alice Liddell, and a great deal has been made of this by writers of fiction and non-fiction alike; indeed, it is a central image of Carroll's mythology. There has never been any real evidence to support the idea, however, and the 'new wave' of Carrollian analysis has called it into serious doubt, particularly since the discovery in 1996 of the 'cut pages in diary' document in the Dodgson family archive has reshaped the debate in a major and surprising way.

For a few brief years in the 1860s he was tormented by an extreme psychological pain and guilt that remains little understood; a portion of the diary record for this time is now missing, compounding the mystery. During this turbulent period he rejected the priesthood that had been his planned career since childhood. This step should have cost him his Studentship and his job as Mathematical Lecturer, but Dean Liddell, somewhat inexplicably, decided to break college rules in order to allow Dodgson to remain at Christ Church without taking holy orders. Nothing about this curious episode has yet been satisfactorily explained.

Dodgson remained at Christ Church throughout his ever-increasing wealth and fame for the next thirty-six years. His father's death in 1868 plunged him into a depression that 'clouded' his life for some time. Little is known about the reasons for this, although many theories abound. He published *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* in 1872, his great mock-epic *The Hunting of the Snark* in 1876 and his last novel, the two-volume *Sylvie and Bruno*, in 1889 and 1893 respectively. He also published many mathematical papers under his own name and toured Russia and Europe on an extended visit in 1867.

In 1881 he gave up the Mathematical Lectureship he had probably never much liked and began a life of increasing leisure and some eccentricity. He became a member of the Society for Psychical Research at its inception in 1882 and an active campaigner against vivisection during the 1870s. From 1869 he owned a house in Guildford, where he housed two maids, his six unmarried sisters and a seemingly ever-changing variety of nieces and nephews and other extended family. It was in a back bedroom of this

teeming family home that he died suddenly of violent pneumonia, on 14 January 1898, leaving mystery and enigma and an already burgeoning mythology behind him.

PART I

PAINTING THE ROSES: THE MAKING OF A MYTH

1

A Necessary Otherness

The path of the biographer is beset with pitfalls ... for him *suppressio veri* is almost necessarily *suggestio falsi* ...

– Stuart Dodgson Collingwood

‘LEWIS Carroll’ was conceived as a pseudonym for a young and aspiring Oxford mathematics lecturer as he took his first steps into the literary career he had always wanted. His first publication was a dull little poem called ‘Solitude’ that showed little promise of genius. Nevertheless, by the time the lecturer died he had indeed become very successful at his chosen profession and ‘Carroll’, his convenient *nom de plume*, had morphed into something his creator could never have envisaged: a receptacle for human hope and aspiration, guilt and pain; a symbol of something as indefinable as the story the lecturer had created in his name. The fiction of ‘Carroll’ and the fiction of *Alice* had become the two parts of a bizarre and unique symbiosis; penetrating one another, merging until the boundaries of their identities are no longer clear. At the centre of the Carroll image lies ‘Alice’ and at the centre of ‘Alice’ lies the image of Carroll; a haunting presence in the story, a shifting dreamy impression of golden afternoons, fustiness, mystery, oars dripping in sunripping water. The name ‘Lewis Carroll’, an invention, the conceit of a man who liked to play with words and symbols, had become in itself a word-symbol, a semi-tangible rendering of a subliminal idea.

Even while Dodgson was very much alive, for his contemporaries, the Victorians, caught as they were on the cusp of a new age, ‘Lewis Carroll’ seems to have begun to mean a readiness to believe – in wonderland, fairytales, innocence, sainthood, the vision of a fading golden age of certitude when it had seemed possible for humanity to transcend the human condition. When people evoked ‘Carroll’ it was always in these terms of unearthliness and antiquity, even while the man who was ‘Carroll’ was

possibly less antique than the people using him as a vehicle for nostalgia. His image was never of the 'now' or of the wholly real world, even when the man who was nominally that 'Carroll' was no more than fifty years old and very much a man of his time.

But, although he did not in any way create the image, Dodgson was no mere passive recipient. In fact, he seems to have been one of the first to perceive the growth of the myth surrounding 'Carroll', and with what might seem typical contrariness he both deplored and manipulated it. On occasions he seemed to do everything he could to challenge the public expectation of 'Carroll'; flaunting his adult lady-friends ('Carroll' was already supposed, as an axiom, to involve himself solely with children) as if inviting the shattering of the illusion or angrily returning mail sent to his home address as 'Lewis Carroll';¹ at others he would seem to play the part as his society had scripted it, with absolute conviction if not almost ironic emphasis. Part of the reason for this response may lie in the fact that 'Carroll' began to be famous at a time in Dodgson's life when he was most filled with self-doubt and a sense of personal sin, most motivated to reinvent himself in a better, worthier form. The image of the patron saint of children offered itself at precisely the right time to offer him a means of that reinvention, although it seems a part of him continued to resent this rebaptism and to assert periodically the right of 'unreformed' Dodgson to exist and shock people by befriending ladies. Purity was exactly what the Victorians wanted to connect with Carroll, and purity was precisely what it (intermittently) suited Dodgson to have associated with himself. As if in a novel by Nabokov, by a kind of mutual agreement, he and his society began creating their mutually beneficial story of 'Carroll' where self-referencing and irony blended into heart-rending sincerity and out again and performance could become life.

Before I am accused of levelling a sacred image, let us be clear that his affection for children was undoubtedly genuine and spontaneous – and indeed a very attractive aspect of his personality. Long before 'Carroll' existed Dodgson enjoyed their company and was gifted by nature to be an ideal older brother (which, of course, he was), inspiring games, telling stories, revelling in the adoration and enthusiasm of his young followers.² But, as the image of 'Carroll' began to develop and as Dodgson's self-

perception went through its unnamed crisis that seemed to strip him of his sense of self-worth, so his relationship with 'the child' ceased to be simply a spontaneous expression of an aspect of himself and began to be self-aware, exaggerated and, inevitably, somewhat insincere. It became an emanation of the curious and now much misunderstood Victorian obsession with childhood innocence, that identified immaturity with inviolability in a way impossible for us now. It morphed from Alice, the spontaneous little loudmouth, into Sylvie, the stiffly self-conscious 'angel'. He began to play the very fashionable part of child-worshipper, with a strange mix of deep religious fervour and frank irony. He invented the term 'child-friend' to typify his perceived social interaction but misused it with almost malicious intent. He worshipped 'the child' as an article of faith and at the same time exploited it as a means of concealment for his own unconventional, potentially scandalous, relationships with women.³ It was inextricably bound up with his wish to rediscover himself as an innocent man, and – on a different level – his more cynical wish for others to see him as innocent. In this sense, the mature Charles Dodgson's love for the child was always – in part – a construction.

Still, by the 1890s when Dodgson was in his early sixties, the 'reality' of this image was already an axiom, and magazine articles celebrated 'a genuine lover of children', 'as tenderly attached to his mathematical studies as he is to children', inhabiting 'an El Dorado of innocent delights'.⁴ In keeping with the vaguely religious and Christ-like undertone of his mythology, 'Carroll' was, from the outset, required to appear chaste (even now, when widely perceived as a deviant, he is defined absolutely as a non-practising, essentially innocent and virginal deviant). An abstinence from sexual activity, or even the potential for sexual activity, is apparently the first requirement of his mythology, and it is an indication of the power this requirement already exerted that while Charles Dodgson was openly befriending grown-up women, and was the subject of gossip for doing so, his alter ego was still perceived to be a wholly innocent 'dreamer of children'. The two conflicting images coexisted but never touched, as if they really were about two entirely different people, and, like the 'cut pages in diary' document,⁵ the inconsistency became somehow invisible or unimportant.

However complicit he may have been in using the prevalent fictions to his own advantage, the myth was not of Dodgson's making. It existed beyond his control, and it effortlessly survived him. When Dodgson died in the new year of 1898 'Carroll' continued much as before with barely a blip. To the irresistible process that had seized him the death was hardly more than the shedding of a skin.

The first real act in the creation of the myth of 'Lewis Carroll' was an act of destruction. In February 1898, just a few weeks after Dodgson's unexpected death, his younger brother Wilfred paid E.J. Brooks, auctioneer, of Magdalen Street, Oxford, to carry away and burn an unspecified quantity of his personal papers.⁶ What remained of his letters, diaries and other private writing would disappear into the family archive, where it would remain all but unseen and entirely inaccessible to biographers for some seventy years, while even more of its content would continue to be mysteriously shed and mislaid.

It was in the space of this strange lacuna that 'Lewis Carroll', as we know him, was born. His name had been created, many years before, by the man whose face he wore. But the soul of 'Carroll', as it presently is known, owes more to this absence than to any other single thing.

Dodgson's death was not anticipated. Before the sudden onset of his fatal pneumonia he had been in excellent health. He had left his apartment in Christ Church a few weeks earlier to spend Christmas with his family in Guildford, expecting to be back at the university early in the new year. But in that cold January it wasn't a returning Charles who turned the key in the door on staircase no. 7, Tom Quad, and stumbled his way up the dark passage to the red-and-green study. It was Wilfred. The funeral had been and gone, and Wilfred was there to do his duty. His brother's will appointed him as the executor to his literary and personal estate.

Six years younger than his famous brother, but with an obvious family likeness in his wavy grey hair, Wilfred was fifty-nine and a prosperous man of business. For many years he had been a land agent for the wealthy Lord Boyne and lived in some style in a pleasant house in the border country between England and Wales. He had married back in 1871 and by this time was the father of nine children. By all accounts he was a level-headed and worldly man, and it was probably these qualities that had persuaded his

brother to name him and another younger brother, Edwin, as executors instead of the older but more unstable Skeffington.

Charles had been the head of a large and dependent family – seven sisters, three brothers and their own dependents and offspring, as well as a considerable number of cousins; a family that had been accustomed to look to the eldest brother for financial and moral support for nearly thirty years. He had funded countless nephews and nieces and second cousins through school, used his influence among the great and good to get them jobs and paid unofficial pensions to the widowed or poverty-stricken. The person chosen to manage the transfer of this great human responsibility, to say nothing of the literary inheritance, would carry a considerable burden.

Wilfred arrived in Oxford on 28 January. He was alone, because the other executor, his brother Edwin, was out of the country. He spent the day looking through the dead man's possessions and stayed overnight with Dodgson's old friend and colleague Thomas Vere Bayne. In his diary Bayne described Wilfred as 'appalled at the mass of papers in his brother's rooms'.⁷ And one can imagine so. For Lewis Carroll had left behind an amount of personal documentation so vast it is hard to visualize. It lay all about Wilfred in the cupboards and drawers of his rooms, filling boxes and cardboard files and pigeon-holes. Forty years of record-keeping. This is a man, let us not forget, who *indexed* his own diary, who kept a record of every letter sent and received for over thirty years in a register that ran to twenty-four volumes (if the Freudians had only known about the 'letter register').

Beside the huge collections of photographs, of books and magazines and letters, there were thirteen volumes of private journal. There was also something he referred to as his 'metallic diary', presumably a metal-bound volume, perhaps with a lock, wherein he recorded his most absolutely personal thoughts and feelings. If Dodgson's own testimony is to be believed there were also separate works dealing with his mathematical work and various leisure pursuits. His life must have been dominated by little grey notebooks. They must have lain about the place like tribbles, appearing in unexpected locations, apparently breeding in the drawers. But one man's compulsion is a biographer's Aladdin's cave. The result of all this fevered note-keeping was a life recorded to the utmost. History would have had cause to be grateful for his obsession. But history never got the chance.

Wilfred may have been appalled at the size of his task, but he was obviously not daunted. After the burning came the auction, in which almost everything Charles had possessed that was remotely saleable was disposed of. Finally the remaining letters and papers disappeared into the care of his family, and something like 80 per cent of them were never seen again. The archive was guarded jealously by generations of Dodgsons. No biographer or researcher was to be permitted any real access to it for some sixty years.

We shall return to the puzzle of how and why this was so later; for now we need to know only that the lacuna was there: an acute absence of data; a biographical scotoma into which all real possibility of understanding the man vanished without trace.

Meanwhile the obituaries of January 1898 set a tone of respectful eulogy on a Christian life decently lived. It is not surprising that they had nothing to say about its more controversial aspects. This was nineteenth-century England, which did not have quite our modern appetite for the 'outing' of the guilty. But amnesia about the reality of Dodgson's life extended beyond what was required by the most punctilious discretion into something far stranger.

Over the years immediately following his death many people who had known Dodgson left their impressions of him. These were almost uniformly sincere tributes from those who had admired, respected or loved him. But even the most affectionate of them seemed unable to forget it was 'Lewis Carroll' they were conjuring, and in pursuit of him not only did they choose to disregard those aspects that might have appeared morally ambiguous, they began a process of selective remembering, concentrating on the special, the magical, the unworldly or childlike aspects of Dodgson's character to the exclusion of the ordinary, the everyday, the 'normal' or the worldly.⁸

What he could never be was an adult, human male. And most things that demonstrated his sexual identity, his adulthood, were swiftly lost from the tradition, while hyperbole converted his eccentricities into near grotesqueries, his complexities into simplistic absolutes. He had to be sealed off from the ordinary, preserved for posterity, half in the cloister, half in fairyland. It was a process expedited, perhaps legitimized, by the first work of biography to appear after his death.

The first, and still the only 'official' biography of Lewis Carroll appeared within eleven months of his death. Written by his own nephew, Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll* was published in December 1898 and was to remain the only full biography for some forty-seven years.

Collingwood was the son of Dodgson's younger sister Mary. He attended Christ Church as an undergraduate and certainly saw a reasonable amount of his uncle at that time and after. In writing his biography he had access to all the private papers and all thirteen volumes of Dodgson's private diary (including four volumes that are now missing) begun around 1853 and kept regularly until his death. At first glance it might seem that all this ought to have made his book an unimpeachable first authority. The reality is not quite that simple.

The Dodgsons were an intensely reticent and an intensely religious family, even set against an age of reticence and religious fervour. They were High Church and rather narrow Anglicans, and, unsurprisingly, after his death their primary concern in all their handling of 'Lewis Carroll's' estate and literary inheritance tended to be to protect their famous relative, and indeed themselves, from any dismaying aspects of his life becoming publicly known.

To this we must add the fact that Victorian biography was not much like its modern counterpart. It was not intended to be about reflecting reality, digging for detail or revealing psychological insights; it was primarily performing a similar function to an official portrait by Holbein or Reynolds, in which the subject would be represented as reflecting all the virtues appropriate to his class and time, and, as with such paintings, these official biographies, whether they were notionally of Millais, Ruskin, Leighton, Gladstone or indeed Carroll, tended to end up resembling each other more than any idiosyncratic reality of the individual concerned.

Yet another factor was that Collingwood was writing about a man who had already become widely mythologized even before his death, as we have seen. The poem published in *Punch* on 29 January 1898, just fifteen days after the corporeal Charles Dodgson had taken his last breath, shows how firmly fixed in the public perception were certain key elements of what became developed as the myth of 'Lewis Carroll':

Lover of children! Fellow-heir with those
Of whom the imperishable kingdom is! ...
The heart you wore beneath your pedant's cloak
Only to children's hearts you gave away:
Yet unaware in half the world you woke
The slumbering charm of childhood's day.⁹

The process of transmogrification, of turning a real human man into a simple set of symbolic qualities that speak universally to the human condition, was already under way before Collingwood set pen to paper, indeed before Dodgson himself was even dead, and the idea that the real Dodgson, highly educated, worldly and self-aware, was, like any real human being, far more complex than this was something already rather inadmissible.

Collingwood's paradigm was possibly also, and quite consciously, about creating a popular and best-selling book that would be his ticket of entry into the world of letters. He had nurtured literary aspirations for some time and had even engaged his famous uncle's help in trying to get work as a reviewer – without success.¹⁰ For some years he had been languishing in a teaching job for which he seems to have had little liking. The commission to produce the 'official' life of the great Carroll was therefore a unique chance for him to establish himself as a writer and escape to better things. He was highly motivated on these grounds alone to produce something he knew to be in line with public interest and appetite.

All these considerations undoubtedly influenced the decisions Collingwood made in mapping the first official outline of 'Lewis Carroll's' life. His family loyalty motivated him to present a respectable and non-controversial image; the power of the pre-existing 'Carroll' myth and perhaps his own desire to be popular probably further motivated him to avoid anything that would run counter to the public expectation. The delineations of his narrative affirm his agenda.

The general tenor of his book presented his uncle's life as if it were easily defined by hard work, self-discipline, rigid conservatism and uncomplicated religious faith. He did not set out to prove this or even to present evidence for it, any more than the aforementioned biographies of Millais, Leighton *et al.* did; he merely adopted it as an axiom, the unquestioned truth at the heart

of his biography. Every aspect of Dodgson's life that was presented was located within these nested assumptions, and the theme of his virtue, conservatism and simplicity runs through the narrative.

In further emphasis of this, throughout the book Collingwood refers to his subject as 'Mr Dodgson', which subliminally suggests the impression in modern readers of a man who was in an almost perpetual state of late middle age. The real Dodgson had, of course, once been a young man who climbed cliffs and enjoyed cricket and wrote verses about being drunk and falling in love with barmaids,¹¹ but one receives little impression of this from Collingwood's account.

Perhaps in part this was because Collingwood had only known his uncle as a man in middle age or beyond (Collingwood had been born in 1870 when Dodgson was thirty-eight). His personal memories would naturally have involved not a youthful energetic persona but a being already caught in the tightening web of age and rigidity. His descriptions of 'the most precise and exact of old bachelors' who 'never wore an overcoat', whatever the weather, who made a rule of 'never accepting invitations out to dine' and 'always wore a tall hat' belong to Dodgson's last ten or fifteen years of life, yet Collingwood didn't make the distinction at all obvious, and the impression is given that this pernicky elderly man was the entirety of everything that Lewis Carroll had ever been.¹²

It is also curious and instructive that Collingwood uses the almost universal habit of Victorian male gentry, the tall hat, adopted by everyone from Wilde to Gladstone, to do service as a badge of an indefinable fustiness he apparently wanted to convey; as if it was an axiom of Dodgson's character that he would 'always' wear a tall hat, even in bed, even in the bath, even, presumably, if he had been born a century later, in Brixton.

His descriptions of Dodgson's life and family background were in general devoid of emotional detail or development and crammed instead with the more bland minutiae that gave content without context. Readers were told about the child Charles Dodgson making a toy train in the garden of his father's rectory and performing magic tricks, wearing an old dressing-gown and a wig,¹³ but virtually nothing was said about the structure or hierarchy of family life, the relationship that existed between the Dodgson children and their parents or anything else to shed any genuine light on the

formative experiences of the man who would one day bring *Alice* to the world. The mother and father were presented as little more than sketchy profiles of proper Victorian virtue, almost as two-dimensional as their paper silhouettes still preserved by the family.

Where darker things may have been Collingwood left only the wispiest of hints. For example, the father, Charles senior, was described as ‘a man of deep piety and of a somewhat reserved and grave disposition’. But this was an idea no sooner picked up than discarded, and no further development of exactly how this ‘reserve’ and ‘gravitas’ may have expressed itself in the lives of his wife and children was allowed to trouble the narrative, which returned quickly to the expected form of Victorian sentiment and virtue, describing his ‘reserve’ as ‘tempered by the most generous charity, so that he was universally loved by the poor’ and his tenure of the parish of Daresbury as betokening this adoration: ‘Though nearly all Mr Dodgson’s parishioners at Daresbury have passed away, yet there are still some few left who speak with loving reverence of him whose lips, now long silenced, used to speak so kindly to them; whose hands, long folded in sleep, were once so ready to alleviate their wants and sorrows.’¹⁴

Lewis Carroll’s mother, who in life seems to have been eclipsed by her husband and children almost entirely, was described by Collingwood as ‘one of the sweetest and gentlest women that ever lived, whom to know was to love. The earnestness of her simple faith and love shone forth in all she did and said; she seemed to live always in the conscious presence of God. It has been said by her children that they never in all their lives remember to have heard an impatient or harsh word from her lips.’¹⁵

Again there is conspicuously (and in proper Victorian style) no development of the dynamic his narrative suggests: ‘reserved’ father and loving mother who does not, or perhaps cannot, express anger. To modern analysis this pairing seems to raise many interesting questions; it hardly seems feasible, even given the crushing effect of conformity on Victorian female spirits, that any woman could spend a lifetime without feeling or expressing any anger at all, particularly with eleven children to raise. If this archetype of Victorian motherhood that Collingwood portrays were not simply his own invention we have to wonder why an adult woman might have ended up feeling unable or unprepared to express any form of negative

emotion. It is not surprising, perhaps, that she died aged forty-seven of 'Inflammation of the Brain', since behind her smile she could very possibly have felt like a dam waiting to burst. But Collingwood's allusive prose leave us with the hint and little else.

Similarly, Lewis Carroll's adolescence was presented with a background hint of trouble:

We all have to pass through that painful era of self-consciousness which prefaces manhood, that time when we feel so deeply, and are so utterly unable to express to others, or even to define clearly to ourselves, what we do feel. The natural freedom of childhood is dead within us; the conventional freedom of riper years is struggling to birth, and its efforts are sometimes ludicrous to an unsympathetic observer.¹⁶

This was immediately contradicted or at least elided:

In Lewis Carroll's mental attitude during this critical period there was always a calm dignity which saved him from [the usual] absurdities, an undercurrent of consciousness that what seemed so great to him was really very little.

And as Dodgson grew older Collingwood's narrative presented him, in general, as only growing ever more virtuous, hard-working and self-denying; always calm, godly, uncomplaining and charitable; 'no outward circumstance could upset the tranquillity of his mind' because he 'resembled the Stoic philosophers'.¹⁷

Another feature of the book is the very Victorian inclusion of sometimes startlingly implausible anecdotes that are supposed to illustrate the generic image of 'virtue'. Witness in particular the section in which Carroll, like his father before him, is portrayed as attaining the most prized badge of Victorian sainthood, the adoration of the poor, particularly poor children, whom, on at least one occasion we are told, he showered with cakes bought by his own money. Collingwood says, quoting an anonymous 'child-friend' as his source:

My sister and I [she writes] were spending a day of delightful sight-seeing in town with him on our way to his home at Guildford where we were going to pass a day or two with him. We were both children and were much interested when he took us into an American shop where the cakes for sale were cooked

by a very rapid process before your eyes and handed to you straight from the cook's hands. As the preparation of them could easily be seen from outside the window a small crowd of little ragamuffins naturally assembled there and I well remember his piling up seven of the cakes on one arm and himself taking them out and doling them round to the seven hungry little youngsters. The simple kindness of his act impressed its charm on his child-friends inside the shop as much as on his little stranger friends outside.¹⁸

It might be needless to say that no such impulsive wealth redistribution was ever recorded by Dodgson in his diaries or letters; indeed, it might seem quite improbable he would ever have thus involved himself with 'little ragamuffins' at all since his approach to 'the poor' involved attitudes of Malthusian fastidiousness (he thought lower-class people – all of them – had 'thick wrists and ankles' and lacked natural grace) that seem slightly extreme even for his time.¹⁹

Perhaps revealingly, some fifty years after Collingwood published this account a different version of the tale was circulated by a man called Lancelot Robson, who relocated the shop and the hungry urchins to Guildford and claimed that his father (not two little girls) was there to witness Dodgson feeding the small boys.²⁰ This strongly implies that there is some kind of powerful and possibly very old archetype being evoked; a retelling of ancient Christian stories of feeding the hungry, which must have a symbolism as old as humanity itself. In this regard it might be interesting to note that an almost identical story has been told about another man not otherwise very similar to Dodgson but who has also been marked out for a similarly strange kind of canonization. The French revolutionary leader Maximilien Robespierre was also claimed to have bought cakes from a store for the poor children and to have distributed them with his own hands – and the story was told yet again by someone who claimed to have witnessed the event first hand. Jungians might find that interesting.

In addition to the kind of confabulation we have already encountered, in his somewhat incomplete fashion Collingwood simply curtailed or elided most of those portions of the narrative not simplistically 'virtuous' enough for his audience or his family's sensibilities. So the elements manifest in Dodgson's private diaries, his dislike of teaching, his frequent evasion of study in pursuit of more enjoyable activities such as novel-reading or

photography, his utterly disorganized failure to prepare for an important scholarship, his well-developed and very human tendencies to find excuses for not doing things he knew he ought to do, are not merely understressed in Collingwood's narrative they are almost totally erased.²¹

He also, more determinedly, practised a wholesale excision of certain key elements of Dodgson's real life, and we should probably look at these quite closely since it was the removal of these aspects that really created the template for the image of 'Lewis Carroll' that was to be current for most of the following century. So here we will detail several of the most overt examples.

As a young and questing photographer Charles Dodgson had befriended several members of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and they were a crucial aspect of his social and artistic life during the 1860s. He deeply admired their art and visited both Rossetti and Millais quite often during this time. It is, along with the second instance quoted below, one of the aspects of his life that displays the degree to which the younger Dodgson was experimenting with ideas, friendships, art forms and so on that would have been counter to the narrow standards of propriety received from his home environment. Collingwood devoted a single short paragraph to the subject of Lewis Carroll's artistic friends and pursuits,²² in which the Pre-Raphaelites were mentioned in passing, without anything to remind his readers that, although they had gained rather more respectability in 1898, they would, in the 1860s, have been unlikely to be approved by Lewis Carroll's father or indeed many respectable Victorians. Perhaps Collingwood simply did not know. But then nor did he mention any of the works of art involving nude representations of women (Rossetti's *Venus Verticordia*, Leighton's *Psamathe*) that Dodgson recorded admiring, and these he must have been aware of if he had read Dodgson's diaries. Thus the man's real-life flirtation with quite unorthodox people and ideas was eased from the narrative.

Another aspect evident from the unexpurgated diaries is the extent to which Dodgson had rejected many key aspects of the High Church Anglicanism learned from his father. At the age of thirty he had abandoned the priesthood (almost at the cost of his job) and at the same time was flirting with the teachings of very radical churchmen such as F.D. Maurice. Collingwood's narrative did not mention Dodgson's interest in the radical

preachings of Maurice and summed up his rejection of the priesthood with hardly any reference to the extreme and possibly disastrous step it was or to the religious doubts that evidently underpinned it. He explained Dodgson's decision by saying it was taken 'because he felt that if he were to do so it would be his duty to undertake regular parochial work, and partly on account of his stammering'.²³

That this is to a large extent an evasion of the question is suggested by the fact that Oxford was full of men in holy orders who did little or no parochial work,²⁴ and there seems therefore little reason to believe that Dodgson would have avoided the priesthood on that account. The suggestion that it was his stammer that persuaded him not to become a priest – in order to avoid the ordeal of frequent preaching – is equally implausible because even though he was not fully ordained Dodgson *did* preach from the pulpit throughout a great deal of his life and would therefore probably not have seen this as a reason for not taking orders. These evasions may, of course, have been Dodgson's rather than Collingwood's (indeed, as we will see elsewhere, he did make some very thin and curious excuses for his reluctance to take orders), but Collingwood conveys them entirely uncritically, thus paving the way for later biographers to do the same.

The third aspect of the legend made possible by Collingwood's elisions concerned Dodgson's relationships with the female sex; the aspect that, more than any other, would come to encapsulate the essence of 'Carroll'. Again the unexpurgated diaries and the surviving letters make it pretty clear that throughout his life Dodgson befriended numerous women and girls who were beyond the age of physical maturity; the evidence shows that it was these mature friendships and profoundly not his associations with children that had been the source of gossip while he was alive, and this is perhaps not surprising as he routinely flouted the conventions of his society by entertaining these women alone in his rooms or taking them to stay on holiday with him unchaperoned. Collingwood acknowledged these friendships in a single sentence that was easily overlooked and which made no mention at all of the 'unconventional' behaviour surrounding them. It is quite understandable that he preferred not to reveal his uncle's less than wholly 'proper' behaviour to a Victorian readership, but his decision to

airbrush these crucial relationships out of the biography would have a massive, even disastrous, impact on the way his uncle was to be understood.

Dodgson's diaries for the period of the 1860s are littered with unexplained passages of self-accusations of 'sin'. His text does not name this specifically, but he used words such as 'evil', and 'weak flesh' to describe himself. He implored God to 'raise me from the dust' and described himself as suffering a 'cold heart' and 'corrupt affections'. Such words are intense and suggest extreme self-disgust, possibly even extreme 'sin' of some kind.²⁵

With considerable impact on the growing legend Collingwood chose to omit all specific reference to these episodes from his book and replace them with his own one-paragraph summary that sets the episode firmly within the context of an over-zealous conscience:

His Diary is full of ... modest depreciations of himself and his work, interspersed with earnest prayers (too sacred and private to be reproduced here) that God would forgive him the past, and help him to perform His Holy will in the future. And all the time that he was thus speaking of himself as a sinner, and a man who was utterly falling short of his aim, he was living a life full of good deeds and innumerable charities, a life of incessant and unremitting fulfilment of duty.²⁶

Collingwood's narrative gave the impression that such self-criticisms were essentially mild and lifelong and therefore likely to be simply a habit of mind. He further implied that the data offers some kind of proof that the self-recriminations were groundless, claiming that in reality the man was 'living a life full of good deeds' at the time. But this is hard to sustain evidentially. Dodgson's period of pain was not lifelong; it was quite narrowly delineated over a single four- to six-year period of his life in the 1860s, and there is no extant proof of what it was about, whether groundless or otherwise. Nor is it easy to see anything particularly consistent with a man who was living a life of 'incessant and unremitting fulfilment of duty'; Dodgson's existence during this youthful period seems to have been rather easy-going, with minimal work to do and plenty of leisure time that he generally employed in enjoying himself. Collingwood's narrative therefore decontextualizes the episode quite significantly.

In contrast to these elisions and omissions of the more controversial or ambiguous aspects of Dodgson's life, Collingwood extensively developed other more 'acceptable' areas. Most influentially perhaps, while Dodgson's numerous friendships with women had been encapsulated in a single sentence, his 'child-friendships' were developed over seventy-two pages – more than a sixth of the entire book – with much sentimental detail. Collingwood even dedicated his book 'to the child-friends of Lewis Carroll' and created this as the framework of his image: 'from very early college days began to emerge that beautiful side of Lewis Carroll's character which afterwards was to be, next to his fame as an author, the one for which he was best known—his attitude towards children, and the strong attraction they had for him.'²⁷

While this in itself was probably quite true, the emphasis Collingwood employed, together with the absenting or understating of any other 'side' of the man, created an impression that was not really a reflection of the experiential reality of Dodgson's life or even of the relative numbers or value of these friendships; it was a reflection of the public image of 'Lewis Carroll', which was of itself a reflection of the curious Victorian phenomenon that has been dubbed the 'cult of the child' and which needs to be understood if Collingwood's behaviour is to be seen in proper context.

Without going into a plethora of detail, suffice it to say that Victorian sexual morality was almost a mirror image of our own. Although child pornography and paedophilia existed, they had not infiltrated the consciousness of the moral majority of the time. The axiom then was that a girl became sexualized at the age of fourteen. After that she was capable of attracting sexual desire and attention; before that age such a thing was deemed impossible in decent society. It followed syllogistically that while a bachelor who openly consorted with girls of fourteen, sixteen, twenty or more would be suspected of sexual or romantic intent or activity, a bachelor who confined his attentions to girls below the magic age would be generally perceived as 'innocent'; indeed, more than this, he would be seen as, in a sense, renouncing the flesh in preference for the spirit. Being identified as loving children in the Victorian mind was to be identified as belonging to a higher order of life, beyond the coarse and everyday; it conferred on the owner of this virtue a badge of saintliness that it is hard for us to understand

today. 'Lewis Carroll' as a public phenomenon, as an image, encapsulated more than any other single figure the meaning of this aspiration. While Dodgson was still alive and associating with numerous woman-friends, his alter ego had been routinely identified as belonging exclusively to children. For Collingwood to have admitted otherwise, to have said publicly that 'Lewis Carroll', a bachelor, wanted to consort with and *did* consort with sexually mature, potentially available adult women in unchaperoned conditions, to admit that he was interested in viewing their naked bodies in works of art and photographs would be to destroy the very nature of everything that Carroll was supposed to be. Of all things, it must be this aspect of Dodgson's reality that must remain unacknowledged if 'Carroll' was to survive as a concept.

Collingwood probably knew this at both a conscious and at deeper levels of his being. Instinctively he may have grasped that were he to convey the details of his uncle's numerous women-friends he would be destroying something that had immense value and power. More prosaically, of course, the details of these friendships also conveyed the possibility that his uncle had been behaving immodestly in his private life, and such a thing would have been inadmissible to any Victorian, whether he was wrestling with a legend or not. To admit in print that 'Lewis Carroll' had dined and holidayed tête-à-tête with young ladies, stayed overnight in the homes of widows or of married women while their husbands were away would have been tantamount to admitting that he was potentially a fornicator or even an adulterer. This simply would not do. It is therefore not hard to understand why Collingwood had minimized the significance of the women in Dodgson's life to near zero nor why he chose instead to emphasize the 'little girls'. But the extent to which he was manipulating an image can be seen by the fact that his presentation of the material is at odds with the content.

Collingwood quoted extensively from gentle, jokey, affectionate letters to many different girls, which were indeed charming, warm and intimate. What he did not do was give any definite idea of how old any of these 'children' might have been. The general tenor of his commentary gave the impression that they were mostly very young, but few ages were actually offered or confirmed, and this is probably because nearly half of his sample of 'letters to child-friends' (fifteen out of thirty-seven) were actually written

to girls *over* the magic age of fourteen, and more than a quarter – ten – were to women aged eighteen or more. The evidence presumably could not be made to fit the image, even with an effort; the irony of this is almost overwhelming.

In further support of the loosely implied, but quite bogus, idea that all the females of importance in Dodgson's life were children Collingwood went on to claim that 'in a large proportion of cases, the [child-friendships] ended with the end of childhood.'²⁸ This was to be a crucial sentence indeed; taken up universally by later biographers as indicating that Dodgson 'lost interest' in females once they reached physical maturity, so it is worth considering what Collingwood was actually trying to convey and indeed how true it actually was.

It is easy to confirm that Dodgson frequently made the claim that the majority of his child-friendships ended with puberty, saying things like 'about 9 out of 10 I think of my child-friendships get shipwrecked at the critical point "where the stream and river meet"'. But the context needs to be observed. These claims were very often made to some young woman of his acquaintance who was no longer a child, and usually they were couched in terms to suggest that this young woman was special if not unique in continuing to allow him to be intimate with her after she had grown to maturity. The words quoted above are from a letter to 26-year-old Isabel Standen, who was a lifelong friend of his, and the sentence before this reveals that Dodgson is telling her how much he values being permitted to be intimate with a grown woman he has known as a child: 'I always feel specially grateful to friends who, like you, have given me a child-friendship and a woman-friendship too ...'²⁹

Dodgson is expressing regret that his child-friendships often end 'where the stream and river meet' and pleasure in the fact that he can advance from a child-friendship to a woman-friendship. Crucially this makes it quite clear that, even if it is true that most of his friendships did end at this age, it was not Dodgson who was ending them. He was not losing interest in the girls because they were physically mature, nor indeed does Collingwood suggest this is the case; this interpretation would be added later as we shall see.

But how rare was it in reality for Dodgson to retain the friendship of a woman who had once been his 'child-friend'? One answer might be found in

the fact that there are at least three other almost identical letters on the subject to be found in the published correspondence alone, each to a different young woman (or in one case her mother) and each saying how unique she is in allowing him to remain intimate with her and how pleased and grateful he feels.³⁰ Other clues can be found in the letters in which he himself makes a completely opposite claim, as in another letter to the same Isabel Standen: 'I may tell you that I have many and many a girlfriend who has made no change in behaviour towards me from childhood upwards and even into married life.'³¹

Dodgson was – quite typically – reinventing the truth to suit a given occasion. At one moment he is the man who loses most of his child-friends when they grow up; at the next he is the man with '*many and many*' [emphasis added] an adult friend that had once been a child-friend. The myth, of course, has taken up the first claim and forgotten the second. But which in reality is closest to the truth?

The answer to that is quite evident from simply reading the numerous letters of his to women-friends whom he had known as children. Judging by this, his child-then-woman-friendships were legion, from Ina Liddell and Theo Heaphy to Gertrude Chataway, the Hatch sisters, the Miller sisters and many more. Collingwood's biography took an aspect of his uncle's self-description that most closely fitted the mythology of 'Carroll' and turned it into an orthodoxy, even though it could easily be shown to be untrue. Like the pages of letters to 'little girls' – half of whom were teenagers or women – the image melts away as we try to assess it. We are forced to acknowledge that even at its very source the idea of Dodgson's exclusive attachment to prepubescent children simply had no substance.

By simply setting a tone of uncomplicated virtue and removing or downplaying the more obviously complex aspects of Dodgson's life Collingwood rendered that life instantly more 'respectable', more 'Carroll', but he also flattened its contours. He gave an impression, perhaps almost accidentally, that Dodgson's life was not only virtuous and respectable but almost entirely empty of deep or meaningful experience. It was this image of emptiness that was to be one of the most enduring aspects of the biography as it developed over the ensuing years. But this portrait was not a reflection of the data at Collingwood's disposal, nor was it ever intended to be. What

the book-buying public purchased in their thousands in the Christmas of 1898 and what they continued to buy for much of the next hundred years was a carefully packaged and carefully edited image that had been moulded to reflect the fashions of virtue and charm as experienced by the middle classes of late Victorian England. For us today the question ‘Was Lewis Carroll actually like that?’ is therefore almost redundant; Collingwood himself was palpably not addressing the question of reality. He did not go out to interview ‘the poor’ of Daresbury before announcing they all ‘universally loved’ Lewis Carroll’s father, any more than he thought it significant whether or not the ‘children’ in his narrative had actually been children at all. For Collingwood and his Victorian readers this kind of veridical reality was irrelevant. What was paramount was that there should be a story that conformed to the proper requirements of decency and virtue and to the demands of the growing and passionately believed-in myth of ‘Carroll’. And so Collingwood produced his portrait of a life without pain, where all attachments, except with little girls, were so briefly referenced they seemed almost not to exist, with a large allusive emptiness where the details of a life ought to have been. And this was to be the basis of the ‘official’ image of Lewis Carroll for many years to come.

At the same time, in referencing the development of the biographical tradition that his book can be said to have founded, it is interesting and significant to note what Collingwood’s narrative does not do. It does not, for example, claim that central tenet of the myth – that Dodgson ‘hated’ male children. In fact, Collingwood quotes Dodgson’s own jokey proclamation “I like children, except boys” and observes: ‘On the few occasions when I have seen him in the company of boys, he seemed to be thoroughly at his ease, telling them stories and showing them puzzles.’³²

Although it manifestly avoided all detailed reference to the many women Dodgson befriended, it did not anywhere claim, as later biographers began to do, that Carroll actually disliked or avoided adult females – in fact, it went so far as to acknowledge in odd little throwaway lines that many of his uncle’s friends were ‘ladies’ and even that he ‘pined for’ a friendship that endured beyond the end of childhood. And despite the implication of isolated fustiness it did not claim that Dodgson had a lifelong aversion to ‘society’ or to adult pursuits; in fact, it acknowledged – again in a single

sentence – that ‘although in later years Mr Dodgson almost gave up the habit of dining out, at this time of his life [the 1860s] he used to do it pretty frequently’.³³ Between the lines of allusiveness, implication and gagging sentimentality, Collingwood, whether by accident or design, did leave indicators to an underlying if unacknowledged reality. Beneath the plangent tones of his leitmotif of unrelenting virtue, calm serenity and passionlessness, Collingwood permitted little discordant riffs and murmurs suggestive of a deeper reality.

Set against the claim of stoic calm is a throwaway line describing his uncle as liable to get overheated in an argument. Set against the portrait of unremitting childhood virtue is the fragment of a letter Dodgson wrote confessing to the ‘incalculable time’ he spent at school writing out ‘impositions’ as punishments for unnamed bad behaviour and Collingwood’s description of him as a boy who could ‘use his fists’ (even if he had to add that this was ‘in defence of a righteous cause’).³⁴

Set against the image of Carroll ‘always [rising] at the same early hour’ and being ‘very abstemious always’, Collingwood sets the odd discordant picture of his uncle taking nothing for lunch every day ‘but a glass of wine and a biscuit’.³⁵ He does not address the questions raised by his own sometimes inconsistent text – for example, is ‘abstemious’ really the word of choice for a man who has a glass of wine on a nearly empty stomach most days for lunch? Yet he did, whether by accident or design, leave the questions there waiting to be asked.

Interestingly, the predominantly liquid lunch receives vivid development from another family member. Carroll’s niece Violet, Collingwood’s cousin, also remembered ‘Uncle Charles’ refusing to eat when the family sat down to lunch.

I remember him ... pacing the dining-room while the rest of the party lunched, sipping his sherry and helping himself to a dry biscuit from the biscuit barrel.³⁶

A man drinking wine or sherry, eating nothing but a dry biscuit and pacing up and down the dining-room while his family try to eat; it must have left a deep impression on those who witnessed it, as Collingwood must have done. If it was anyone but Carroll how would we interpret this? Frayed nerves? Uncontrollable tension? It certainly does not resonate as a man with

all the inner calm of the ‘Stoic philosophers’, and it might be that if we knew anyone who habitually did this we would worry, and *not* about his ‘abstemiousness’. Collingwood, for whatever reason, left a small hint of that possibility for posterity to uncover if it chose.

Again, while asserting Dodgson’s uncomplicated and narrow virtue at every opportunity, Collingwood still let slip that his uncle had admired the poetry of Algernon Swinburne, ‘that poet who stands alone and unappreciated among the poets of the day, and whom Mr Dodgson used to call “the greatest living master of language”’.³⁷

Was he unaware of how marginal and scandalous that poet’s life and work had been? (The first edition of his *Poems & Ballads* had been banned on publication in 1866 and condemned even by that arch-sensualist Dante Gabriel Rossetti, yet Dodgson had a copy on his bookshelves, indicating that Collingwood’s admission was accurate.) Or was he intentionally permitting a rare glimpse of his uncle’s deeper reality to break the surface?

A similar question can be applied to the most famous of these curious hints that concerns the still-vexed subject of Dodgson’s cycle of love poetry, written between 1860 and 1868. Observing the sadness and loss endemic in these verses Collingwood allowed himself – almost, it seems, against his better judgement – a short and cryptic observation: ‘One cannot read this little volume without feeling that the shadow of some disappointment lay over Lewis Carroll’s life. Such I believe to have been the case ... But those who loved him would not wish to lift the veil from these dead sanctities, nor would any purpose be served by so doing.’³⁸

He asserts a belief that Dodgson’s love poetry had been inspired by real experience, yet his Victorian sense of decency will not let him ‘lift the veil’ any further than that. Given the fact that Collingwood, alone of all the biographers, had unlimited access to Dodgson’s entire diary, including the four now missing volumes – two of which cover part of the period in which this poetry was written – and to numerous of his letters that are now missing, this statement is potentially quite significant. Indeed it was a statement he himself may have had later cause to regret, since by 1932 he was apparently trying to distance himself from his own claim.³⁹

Although this passage has been quoted at various times by most commentators on Dodgson’s life in the hundred and more years since it was

written, it demonstrates the strange compulsion of the Carroll mythology that it has usually been quoted only to be denied. Virtually no biographer who came after Collingwood accepted his hint that he knew of a love affair and did not want to lift the veil on it. Most found reasons to disbelieve or disparage the mere idea, and those few who did not generally interpreted it as being about the only female that Carroll has ever been permitted to love within the context of the mythology – Alice Liddell – and as representing his assumed chaste and unrequited passion for her, even though the cycle of the poetry itself seems to offer little support for such a reading. No biographer over the next century would take Collingwood's words to suggest what they seem quite clearly to be intended to suggest: that Lewis Carroll may have had an adult love affair that ended in unhappiness and a shadow of disappointment. Collingwood, whose word has been Gospel in almost everything else, has been consistently rejected only here and only, it seems, because the idea of even a potential experience of adult love has become anathema to the tradition of 'Carroll' that has developed since he wrote his biography. If the social need to develop and believe in Carroll had been perhaps less irresistible, then it might be that later biographers would have felt able to apprehend this and the other indicators of a deeper reality in Collingwood's book that show the incompleteness of the image he is offering. As it was, the very opposite was the case. Subsequent biographers did not apprehend these indicators; they erased them or poured scorn on even the possibility that they might have any meaning to convey. They turned Collingwood's allusions and impressions into stark certainties. They lost the sentence about dining out 'pretty frequently' when young but retained the impression of reclusiveness that, in fact, belonged only to Dodgson's later years. They lost the sentence about the numerous 'lady' friendships and retained the vivid portrait of the 'little girls' without question or investigation. In that sense it was to be the ones who came after Collingwood rather than the nephew who finally removed the reality of Carroll's adult life from his biography.

Collingwood created the outline of the 'Carroll' we now know, but as Charles Dodgson's nephew, with all the material of his life before him, he was forced to be aware of the reality of the man beneath the gloss of the image he was helping to create, and this knowledge could not help but

inform his writing whether he wanted it to or not. It is there in the elisions and even entangled in the text in throwaway lines that could – and did – pass almost unnoticed. His foreword suggests with almost confessional honesty that he personally knew the significance of his process of elimination and might almost have wished to leave a hint of it to posterity: ‘I am well aware that the path of the biographer is beset with pitfalls and that for him *suppressio veri* [the suppression of truth] is almost necessarily *suggestio falsi* [to suggest falsehood] – the least omission may distort the whole picture.’

He even came close to admitting his own failure: ‘To write the life of Lewis Carroll as it should be written would tax the powers of a man of far greater experience and insight than I have any pretension to possess, and even he would probably fail to represent adequately such a complex personality.’⁴⁰

Perhaps this is the key to understanding what Collingwood was trying to do. After all, he knew better than anyone the true ‘complexity’ of how Charles Dodgson had lived. He would have been fully aware – as we are now just becoming aware – that this man was never the simplistic paragon of abstemiousness and early-rising and frugality. He knew that Uncle Charles was known among his friends for getting up very late sometimes,⁴¹ that he could be moody and unreasonable, selfish and opinionated, spiteful and vain and over-excited in an argument. He knew that Dodgson’s diaries and letters speak of a highly emotional, sometimes turbulent, self-contradictory and uneasy man, full of doubts and secrets and curious allusive layered thinking. He knew that far from being a simple devout Anglican his uncle flirted with strange religious sects such as the Theosophists and the heretical teachings of men like F.D. Maurice, that he had lived an artistic life that sometimes touched the very edges of respectability; Collingwood knew, indeed could see for himself in his uncle’s papers, that he freely admired and collected images of naked girls and women and owned books that his society dismissed as shocking and vulgar. He knew his uncle had enjoyed many very unorthodox friendships, and he probably knew more about those friendships than any modern biographer possibly could.

He was involved in a conscious – and rationally understandable – partial fabrication, not, as later biographers were, an alternative reality. He was not

trying to put together a watertight portrait of a real human being; he was producing an aspirational model with a certain name and he made little effort to pretend to be doing anything else. His book is absurdly, brazenly, unapologetically selective, exaggerated and pious. It is deliberately cutesy caricature, carefully contrived and packaged, and the impression of artless openness is belied by the sheer extent of the manipulation being practised. But it also, for whatever reason, undermines this acute manipulation with small but irresistible hints of the banished reality, so that it is at one and the same time both a source of the legend and its own subversion. The keys to the unravelling of the very mythology it helped create are to be found in its text. Perhaps we ought to allow him the small benefit of a small doubt and wonder if this was intentional as a small recompense to posterity for his enforced *suppressio veri* and therefore inevitable *suggestio falsi*.

But, if Collingwood almost certainly never believed in the veridical reality of the ‘Carroll’ he was creating, those who came after him did – and fervently so. His readers, the subsequent biographers, journalists, dramatists, readers and watchers – it was to be they who turned Collingwood’s convenience into an *auto-da-fé*, an act of faith and belief in the transcending reality of a being, an eminence, a concept called ‘Lewis Carroll’.

The puzzle for us today is not that Collingwood wrote his biography in the way that he did – as a Victorian he was merely obeying the requirements of his time and class and the agenda in a sense forced on him by family decency – but that for so long afterwards this quite obviously incomplete, deceptive, self-contradictory and cliché-ridden little volume continued to serve, unquestioned, as the basis of the biography of a real human being. For that Collingwood cannot really be blamed.

Quite unsurprisingly, that Christmas of 1898, the first edition of his book sold out within a month. By the end of 1899 a fourth was in print, and Stuart Dodgson Collingwood was probably looking forward to a secure new career as a man of letters. But, sadly, even with this great literary coup, this was to prove beyond him. Lewis Carroll’s nephew and first biographer eventually returned to obscurity and school-mastering, and he carried whatever secrets he knew about his uncle’s life with him to the grave. But the image he helped create lived on and soon gained charismatic support in its

most important contentions with the appearance of a little book entitled invitingly *The Story of Lewis Carroll, as Told by the Real Alice in Wonderland*.

✱

Published a few months after Collingwood in early 1899, *The Story of Lewis Carroll, as Told by the Real Alice in Wonderland* was written not by Alice Liddell, who was in most people's eyes the only 'real' Alice there could ever be, but by one Isa Bowman, an actress. Her title was based on the fact that she had once – thanks to Dodgson's influence – played Alice on stage. Her book was a memoir of her relationship with her 'uncle' and benefactor.

In contrast to Collingwood's rather leaden style, Bowman's book was an engaging and emotional account of a 'little girl's' experiences chez Lewis Carroll that was full of charm and plausibility. In quick, sure strokes she drew a picture of a beguiling, eccentric and passionate man. As with Collingwood, almost none of her material is sourced and some of her depictions seem to 21st-century eyes almost ironically labelled 'Eccentric Genius'. According to Isa he cannot simply have a pair of grey-and-black gloves, he must, as with Collingwood and the tall hat, wear them 'always' (an observation flatly contradicted by another, possibly less commercially minded 'child-friend', who angrily claimed she did not remember the grey-and-black gloves at all).⁴² For Isa he cannot just visit a dentist but has to do so 'almost daily' – a very bizarre if not compulsive habit that went unremarked either by Dodgson himself or by anyone else who knew him.⁴³ As with Collingwood, she almost shamelessly applied the required sentiments and even included a brief 'memoir' of Carroll by a young man called Arthur Girdlestone, an 'undergraduate at New College', who, Isa claimed, had visited Carroll in his study on 'one winter's evening' only to find him in unusually confessional mood. Girdlestone (if indeed it is he) sets the scene in almost novelistic detail:

He was sitting at a writing table, and all around him were piles of MSS, arranged with mathematical neatness, and many of them tied up with tape. The lamp threw his face into sharp relief as he greeted me. My business was soon over, and I was about to go away, when he asked me if I would have a glass of wine and sit with him for a while.

He talked 'quietly' and in a 'rather a tired voice,' until Girdlestone happened to notice a photograph of a child on the desk.

'That is the baby of a girlfriend of mine,' he said, and then, with an absolute change of voice, 'there is something very strange about very young children, something I cannot understand.' He said that in the company of very little children his brain enjoyed a rest which was startlingly recuperative. Personally I did not understand little children, and they seemed quite outside my experience and rather incautiously I asked if children never bored him. He had been standing up for most of the time, and when I asked him that, he sat down suddenly.

'They are three fourths of my life,' he said.⁴⁴

The vividness of this story demands acceptance, yet there are reasons to be wary. Girdlestone was indeed an undergraduate at New College in the late 1880s, but there is no evidence to show that he ever met Dodgson (the latter does not mention him in his diaries), nor any obvious reason why he would need to visit Dodgson, being an undergraduate at a different college. Nor indeed can we even be sure Girdlestone himself wrote the piece. Bowman quotes him, it is true, but, as we shall see, Bowman was a rather less than wholly reliable purveyor of truth. And even if Girdlestone did write this section, there is still no independent evidence to suggest it is likely to be true. The story is archetypal Victorian 'Carroll' – the images of loneliness, isolation, ascetic hard work, with 'children' as the only source of warmth in an otherwise hermit-like existence. Such images seem far less prominent in his reality than they do in the mythic depictions, so we might be wise to be wary about 'Girdlestone's' objective reality.

Like this section of narrative from 'Girdlestone,' Bowman's whole book is wrapped in a warmth and immediacy entirely lacking in the official biography. She describes a man of 'extreme shyness,' 'old-maidishly prim' in his manner, more at home with children than with adults, and she illustrates this with stories such as this:

We had been walking in Christ Church meadows ... when he suddenly met a brother Don at a turning in the avenue. He was holding my hand and giving me my lesson in geography with great earnestness when the other man came round the corner. He greeted him in answer to his salutation, but the incident

disturbed his train of thought, and for the rest of the walk he became very difficult to understand and talked in a nervous preoccupied manner.⁴⁵

She describes the firelit winter evenings she as a 'little girl' spent with Dodgson, the 'grave professor' when, looking into his eyes, she felt filled with 'love and reverence'. She vividly invokes his moment of fury over a silly sketch she drew of him:

I had an idle trick of drawing caricatures when I was a child, and one day, when he was writing some letters I began to make a picture of him on the back of an envelope. I quite forget what the drawing was like probably it was an abominable libel, but suddenly he turned round and saw what I was doing. He got up from his seat, and turned very red, frightening me very much. Then he took my poor little drawing and tearing it into small pieces threw it into the fire without a word. Afterwards he came suddenly to me, and saying nothing, caught me up in his arms and kissed me passionately.⁴⁶

The jolly incident of 'Bob the Bat':

There was a very wonderful toy which he sometimes produced for me, and this was known as 'the Bat' ... It was an ingeniously constructed toy of gauze and wire, which actually flew about the room like a bat. It was worked by a piece of twisted elastic and could work for about half a minute.

I was always a little afraid of this toy because it was too lifelike, but there was a fearful joy in it. When the music-boxes began to pall he would get up from his chair and look at me with a knowing smile. I always knew what was coming even before he began to speak, and I used to dance up and down in tremendous anticipation.

'Isa my darling,' he would say, 'once upon a time there was some one called Bob the Bat! And he lived in the top left-hand drawer of the writing-table. What could he do when uncle wound him up?'

And then I would squeak out breathlessly, 'He could really FLY!'⁴⁷

The train rides, the holidays at Eastbourne where they would stay together in his lodging-house:

At Eastbourne I was happier even with Lewis Carroll than I was at Oxford. We seemed more free, and there was the air of holiday over it all. Our bedroom doors faced each other at the top of the staircase. When I came out of mine I

always knew if I might go into his room or not by his signal. If, when I came into the passage, I found that a newspaper had been put under the door, then I knew I might go in at once.⁴⁸

The walks to Beachy Head and the rock cakes for tea; holding hands, watching the golden sunsets on the cliff top.

He would take off his hat and let the wind play with his hair, and he would look out to sea. Once I saw tears in his eyes and when we turned to go he gripped my hand much tighter than usual.⁴⁹

He lives with startling vividness in some of her lightning sketches. And what she draws for us is the template of Lewis Carroll, the ‘grave professor’ doting on a ‘little girl’, ‘shy’ of the adult world. Different as her account is from Collingwood’s in style and dramatic flair, they are united in certain things. As with Collingwood, what Bowman does not say can be as revealing as anything she does. For example, there is nothing in her book to suggest that Charles Dodgson paid for her acting lessons or used his influence to promote her career, yet he very definitely did both of these things.⁵⁰ As with Collingwood, she is influenced by her time and the public expectation of what their subject ought to be. And they are both – Bowman and Collingwood – albeit for slightly different reasons, keen to feed that expectation rather than present unequivocal truth.

This is nowhere more obvious than in their treatment of Lewis Carroll’s relationships with the opposite sex. Collingwood implied, without actually stating, that these were confined almost entirely to pre-pubescent children. Bowman helped cement this idea in the public mind by presenting herself as just such a pre-pubescent child. In fact, at one point – describing their falling out and ‘passionate’ reconciliation – she specifically says that she was ‘no more than ten or eleven years old’.⁵¹

This is certainly remarkable, for Isa Bowman was *thirteen* before she met Dodgson. By the time he was paying for her acting lessons and taking her on holiday with him she was in her mid teens. When she last shared his lodgings at Eastbourne she was approaching twenty. Her charming image of ‘the little girl and the grave professor’ is therefore simply a fiction.

It was not a little child walking hand in hand with him across Christ Church Meadow; it was not a little child he kissed in 'passionate' forgiveness. It was not a little child being teased with 'Bob the Bat' or sleeping unchaperoned across the landing from him in Eastbourne. It was a ripe and excitable teenager. Once we know this it is instructive to go back and read the little narrative we quote above again. Whatever took place between the two of them, whatever the truth behind the vivid pictures of firelit evenings and sunset walks, whatever emotional, romantic or sexual forces were at work, they were at work between a middle-aged man and a teenage young woman, way beyond the age of perceived sexual availability. Merely knowing this serves to turn the import of Isa Bowman's narrative on its head and to show the gulf that was already in place between Dodgson's reality and the accepted, acceptable biography of 'Carroll'. Rather than being the template of 'Lewis Carroll and little girls' as it has always seemed to be, Isa's story is its antithesis, a subversion of the very legend it is trying to uphold. Once we know that Dodgson was holding hands with a pretty teenage girl, that it was a girl aged between fourteen and eighteen that he was kissing 'passionately', we are forced to realign our understanding of his life, his morality, his emotional development, indeed almost all received ideas about him.

But why, then, did Isa Bowman deliberately lie to her readers and present herself as a little girl of ten or eleven during her intimate relationship with Carroll? As with Collingwood, to understand this we have to understand something about Victorian morality, which was, as has already been indicated, in some crucial particulars very different from our own.

The true relationship that Isa enjoyed with her 'uncle' would not have been well received by the general reading public of 1899, even without the complication of the Carroll mythology. By this time Bowman was a successful and famous actress, and she owed her fame in large measure to a man who to unsympathetic eyes might have looked suspiciously like a 'protector'. Whatever the truth of their relationship, even if she did spend every night under his roof alone in her own bed, chastely waiting in the mornings for the newspaper signal before entering his chamber, even if he had paid for her clothes, her elocution and singing lessons, helped build her career, out of no other motive than a belief in her talent, she would have found it almost impossible to convince anyone else it was true. The

circumstances would have damned her. Even her name for him, ‘Uncle’ – which had one meaning when used by a pre-pubescent child – would have had quite another in the context of her real age. ‘Uncle’ was the Victorian euphemism for an older, richer lover. To the outside world the story of their true relationship would have read like an admission that this was exactly what he had been.

Of interest here is the account of a woman-friend of Dodgson’s, the author Mary Manners, who met him in company with Isa in 1889. Isa was fifteen at the time and, with her younger sister Nellie, was *en route* to Eastbourne for a holiday with her ‘uncle’ when they stopped off in Croydon to take lunch with Miss Manners. Over the meal

He had been describing a particular kind of collapsible tumbler, which you put in your pocket and carried with you for use on a railway journey.

‘There now’, he continued, turning to the children, ‘I forgot to bring it with me after all’.

‘Oh, Goosie,’ broke in Isa, ‘you’ve been talking about that tumbler for days, and now you have forgotten it’.

He pulled himself up, and looked at her steadily with an air of grave reproof.

Much abashed, she hastily substituted a very subdued ‘Uncle’ for the objectionable ‘goosie’ and the matter dropped.⁵²

Rather naïvely Mary Manners, a Victorian spinster, records what she has seen. Gripped, as she evidently was, by a certain image of ‘Carroll’ she seems to believe she is witnessing a stern ‘uncle’ rebuking a child. But is she? Isa was fifteen, not really a child, even though Manners quite obediently calls her one, and it seems unlikely she would have forgotten herself and spoken so freely if she was not perhaps accustomed to doing so under different circumstances. It seems at least highly possible that calling him ‘Goosie’ was acceptable when they were alone, and this implies a degree of ambiguity in the nature of their relationship. Was it parent-child or something more equal? Did Dodgson, in fact, truly know? But if he did encourage this racy, cheeky near-equal treatment from this teenager who was living with him, travelling with him, sleeping under the same roof as him, then he was not only flouting his society’s conventions he was treading rather a narrow and risky personal line for both of them. Perhaps this ‘Goosie’ makes it even

easier for us to understand why Bowman might feel she needed to be cautious about making public the full, possibly ambiguous, reality of her relationship with Lewis Carroll. If there had been undertones of sexual tension and ambiguity, moments of too great intimacy, even if never overtly expressed, they would make her aware of how inadmissible the truth was, not only for herself but for the sacred image of 'Carroll'. Would she wish to be the one who not only compromised herself but also destroyed, perhaps irrevocably, such a beloved icon? Few people would want to carry such a responsibility as that.

But, of course, while it might be impossible to publish an account of a nubile teen accompanying a bachelor Carroll unchaperoned to his home and sleeping overnight under the same roof, not to mention being on equal enough terms with him to call him 'Goosie', it would seem quite different if the teen were instead a little child, too young to inspire the demon lust in her 'uncle'. If she could sell herself as 'no more than ten' then her story would be instantly converted from potentially destructive, discordant and subversive to amenably appropriate and sweet; instead of being cast as the potential harlot-destroyer of 'Carroll' she could become a handmaiden, whose 'ten-year-old' body held no secret other than the inviolability and chastity of St Lewis.

Within this parameter it is easy to understand why Isa did what she did, why she chose to bend the truth a little in her memoir, court easy popularity and make herself one of Lewis Carroll's already famous 'little girls'. She probably intended to do no more than protect her reputation; in fact, in combination with Collingwood she helped to disseminate an enduring and vastly powerful fiction.

The works of Bowman and Collingwood, confirmed by and confirming the great swell of popular mythology, set the seal on how 'Lewis Carroll' would be remembered. They took a real life and cleansed it of its shadows, its contradictions, its mysteries, its adulthood. What was left behind might have been desperately incomplete, almost caricature, but it was to prove immensely and enduringly popular.

Given the huge popularity at the end of the nineteenth century of the two books quoted above, and given also the human tendency to leap on bandwagons, it is possibly not too surprising that, over the following years,

memoirs proliferated in the popular press and elsewhere of old-maidish 'Lewis Carrolls' in tall hats and grey-and-black gloves being eccentric and querulous or being charming to 'little girls' on the beach. Many of these memoirs were probably apocryphal or at least influenced heavily by the popular sources, and they were developing an image that was at best wildly simplified. But, even so, as the new century began, the myth of the 'child-friends', as Isa's fiction had helped define it, still towered over the collective mind as the defining emblem of what 'Carroll' was, and this in itself inspired its own imitators and believers. Every former little girl who had ever known him, however slightly, wanted to put her name down as one of the elect; to tell her own tale of magic and specialness, to win her own little piece of immortality as the vestal of a new religion. Those girls who had known him slightly claimed to have known him well, those who had met him once on a train, or thought they might have done, or who wished they had, turned this one meeting into a focal point in their lives and column inches in newspapers, adding their voices to the clamorous laudation of St Lewis and his gathering of little girls.

As he began to be seen across the great divide of a brand new century, as all the Victorian certainties collapsed into the disaster of the Great War and the brave new world beyond, so the need to believe that what Carroll was seen to represent had once been real became ever more fervent. For the women – and indeed for the few men who added their voices – he became a latter-day Merlin, holding the spirit of the age within him, half lost in his own vivid fancy, or the quaint, creaky philosopher with a heart of unassailable goodness. He was enshrined as 'one of the few genuine scholar-saints', as 'a bringer of delight in those dim, far-off days', as 'one of those innocents of whom is the Kingdom of Heaven'.⁵³ Would-be child-friend Alice Maitland's heartfelt cry, 'Alas! alas! that life should change; ... all the dear, old, familiar places and faces disappear',⁵⁴ could be the leitmotif for all such memoirists. In their poignant visions of impossible, antique rectitude, in the images of the perpetual child, lost in the golden splendour of a perpetual summer's day, we see not reality but desperate and touching aspiration; the need to be sure that once it had really been like that. And so, as the various memoirists got ever more distant from their memories, drifting into an ever more uncertain time, the more saturated with this

aspiration they became; reaching for vanishing certitude, clutching the hem of the new Messiah as he danced away down the roads of memory, touched by magic, softened by nostalgia; 'the property of an older and vanishing world'.⁵⁵

An in-depth analysis of some of these 'child-friend' memoirs, collected together in the publication *Interviews and Recollections*, shows the extent of this collective 'remembering' of the experience of Carroll along very specific and quite revealing lines, with the women tending to 'remember' themselves or being remembered as younger (never older) than they actually were; their relationship with Carroll closer than it seems actually to have been. Each lady tended to tell a very similar story of 'uniqueness', often with an unacknowledged quasi-romanticism involving implied rivalries and 'jealousies' of other 'child-friends'. There was also a repeated motif of 'inspiration' with a given child-friend claiming to have inspired such and such a piece of Carroll's work, even when it was chronologically quite impossible for them to have done so. (See, for example, Enid Stevens's account of being the model for Sylvie in *Sylvie & Bruno*, which, although frequently quoted, is actually impossible as Carroll did not meet her until after the first volume of the book was published. Stevens also gives very striking examples of the 'rivalry' at work, claiming that 'no one ever had as much of him as I' and suggesting that as she was his 'last' child-friend 'I had no reason to be jealous'.)⁵⁶ The result of this was the creation of a perceived uniformity of 'child-experience' of Carroll that now forms the basis for a large part of our understanding of Dodgson's interactions with the world but which, on closer analysis, can be shown to have never existed in anything like the simplistic and homogeneous way depicted.

What seems to have been happening was the development of a form of group-think, built around the image of Carroll and served by ex- or would-be 'child-friends'; women, becoming middle aged or even elderly as the years passed, who had become possessed to varying degrees by a need to believe and attest that they had been uniquely loved, quasi-romantically and chastely, by a man beyond the norm: a genius; a scholar-saint who had taken their hand and bestowed an immortality on them by association. History provides many such manifestations of this curious female impulse, from the generic Catholic priest and his adoring pastoral collection of local ladies, all

assuming themselves uniquely placed to love and understand him, all prepared to forgive him anything and worship at his too obvious feet of clay, to the insidious strangeness of the Manson cult and the sensually chaste female adoration of Maximilien Robespierre by the radical women of Paris. The Christ-like imagery and the sexuality-sublimated-into-religious-passion are unavoidable in some of the memoirs left behind by Dodgson's most ardent adherents and suggest that one of the closest parallels to the phenomenon of Carroll and his would-be handmaidens is the case of Archdeacon Ebel's chaste harem, in which at least one commentator has seen links with Lewis Carroll.

I always had a mysterious feeling when looking at him and hearing him speak, that he was not exactly an ordinary human being of flesh and blood. Rather did he seem as some delicate ethereal spirit, enveloped for the moment in the semblance of common humanity.⁵⁷

The benefaction which he bestowed upon the world is still with us – the benefaction of a wit that was never sarcastic, a humour that was always sympathetic; and the embodiment in himself of the three essentials of Life: Faith, the light by which to live; Hope, the goal for which to labour; Charity, the wide horizon on which his soul looked out in love.⁵⁸

This is, of course, scarcely a portrait of any real human being, so it is almost unnecessary to demur over detail, but the suggestion that Dodgson – of all people – employed a humour that was always 'sympathetic' and a wit that was never 'sarcastic' is almost tragically comic. Anyone who has ever read his letters or the more bitterly vitriolic (shrewdly unsympathetic and wonderfully sarcastic) portions of any of his fiction would be able to attest to this.⁵⁹

In many ways this ersatz canonization by adorers who had lost all touch with the real human being called Dodgson was a betrayal of the true power and worth of the man and his work. The man who had created *Alice* deserved better than that. But there was no one to gainsay it. Instead, the influence of these passionate 'child-friends' and worshippers served to assist in the creation of a muted hysteria surrounding Carroll, an atmosphere of quasi-religious sentimentality taking on an inquisitorial orthodoxy, making it impossible for anyone to even consider deviating from this 'norm' of

children, innocence, more innocence and more children. Everyone who wanted to be part of the developing story naturally adopted this warmly fashionable, highly charming, if somewhat sickly and insipid, 'truth' and developed it as a vehicle for their own personal experience, whether real or wholly imagined; and almost every remembered social encounter involving 'Carroll' and females was reshaped, probably quite unconsciously, into being about 'little girls', whatever the historical reality may have been.

Quite typical of this curious genre is the memoir of Ruth Waterhouse, née Gamlen, written in 1953 when she was about seventy. In 1892 she became, briefly, one of the 'child-friends', and her parents were invited to dine with Dodgson, who had Isa Bowman staying with him at the time; Ruth tells us Isa was twelve when this occurred. Quite interestingly, her memoir begins with this observation:

He invited Isa to visit him in Oxford and in order that there should be no ill-natured gossip about her visit he arranged for her to stay in the house of an old lady who, my mother said, was gossip's very fountain-head, so associating her with Isa's visit and stopping all chatter at its source.

Knowing the contemporary Victorian ideas about 'little girls' and their immunity to sexuality, we might be wondering why there would have been any gossip at all if Dodgson had been inviting a little girl of twelve to stay. And this might alert us to look all the more carefully at Ruth's narrative. She continues:

And having invited Isa to Oxford he was very anxious that I should meet her, but of course she was on the stage and he was afraid my parents might object. You must remember that this was sixty years ago when actresses occupied a very different position to what they do now and that Mr Dodgson was always extremely careful in observing social conventions. So, in order that my parents might see for themselves what a very nice little girl Isa was, he invited them to meet her at dinner ... You can see it all – Mr Dodgson, never very happy in the society of grown-ups, the poor shy little girl of twelve, and my parents (both of them very good company) doing their best to make themselves agreeable.

Subsequently Ruth herself was taken to meet Isa:

She was so shy and silent that she made me feel shy too and I am afraid that the tea-party was no more of a success than the dinner, but I am almost sure that

Isa came to tea with me one day and we got on much better ...⁶⁰

This reads as a highly truthful story which probably no one would ever think to question. It is palpably honest and sincere. Yet closer analysis reveals a central feature that renders the whole more or less fictitious: in 1892, when all this took place, Isa Bowman was not twelve; she was a grown woman of eighteen.

Once we know this the situation with Ruth her story becomes quite interesting. We can see how she is, apparently unknowingly, imposing her societally received expectation of what 'Carroll' was on to her actual experience. Because of the power of the burgeoning myth she has apparently arrived at a place where she 'remembers' aspects of that myth as part of her own experience, even though they may not have actually happened. She 'remembers' Mr Dodgson was very poor in adult company, even though this seems to be at odds with the fact that it was his idea to hold the dinner party, and indeed we now know this popular image seems to have little basis in reality. His behaviour as she describes it – inviting nubile actresses to stay – is anything but characteristic of someone who is 'extremely careful in observing social conventions'. In fact it is fairly unconventional for the time, and Ruth herself must presumably be aware of this, but she seems to be obeying some form of 'override'; her received belief via the burgeoning myth, that Carroll was always conventional, is stronger than her experience of his actual behaviour, so she describes what she has experienced but adds an explanation that completely contradicts it and brings it in line with the mythic image. In the same way, her actual experience of meeting a sophisticated young actress in Carroll's home is converted by this 'override' into the memory of meeting a 'little girl of twelve'.

Thus, Gamlen takes the true story – Dodgson invites an eighteen-year-old actress to stay with him and averts gossip by lodging her in the house of one of the worst tittle-tattles in Oxford and then possibly embarrasses Gamlen's parents by inviting them to dine with him and the actress at a time when actresses were not approved of in the best society – and converts it incompletely into something appropriate to 'Carroll'. The young woman becomes a child, his daring behaviour becomes 'extreme conventionality' and black, in effect, becomes a greyish shade of white.

This does not seem to be conscious deception. In fact, aspects of the anecdote seem to show Ruth is trying to be truthful; she honestly remembers and records the risky, gossipy atmosphere surrounding Isa's visit, remembers and records her mother talking about the gossip-mongers and how Dodgson dealt with them, even though this makes no sense in the context of her story where Isa is a child. The fact that Ruth tells it anyway, seemingly blinding herself to the inconsistency, suggests she is genuinely 'remembering' this revised version and has merely contrived not to notice the anomalies she has created.

To add to the large-scale distortion, women who had known him tended to say much less about their relationships with him than the ever voluble 'child-friends', perhaps because their stories were less easy to relocate into the prevailing mood. Most of the women he had been most intimate with – Constance Burch, for example – left little or no recollection of their experience of knowing him, and those few women who did publicly remember him were careful to shape their narratives within the accepted limitations of 'Carroll' and to emphasize that, although he befriended them, his major passion was always an innocent adoration of little girls, as if anxious to make it clear they were not offering any challenge to the received story or to his reputation for absolute chastity. Sometimes they envisaged themselves as 'children' or became honorary 'children' by claiming that Lewis Carroll had behaved toward them as if they were little girls,⁶¹ or, like Mary Manners, they swiftly forgot aspects of their real experience and replaced them with memories more in keeping with 'Carroll', 'remembered' little children where there had been teens or adult women or children where there had been nothing but Dodgson alone.

His 'old friend', the actress Ellen Terry, had been broad-minded enough to entertain a large – and possibly confusing – number of Dodgson's women-friends at the theatre. 'Perhaps you'll enlighten me as to who *this* young lady is,' she observed on one occasion and, after being informed that she had been introduced to this particular seventeen-year-old girl twice before that day, exclaimed acidly: 'What a stupid mistake! But I thought Mr Dodgson had *two* young ladies with him.'⁶² Notwithstanding this little aside, she let him persuade her to give his 'darling Isa' elocution lessons and helped many more of his aspiring-actress girlfriends.⁶³

But in her autobiography – written only a few years after Dodgson's death – she recorded none of this. Instead she 'remembered' children and with incredibly uncharacteristic coyness confided that her 'dear Mr Dodgson' was as 'fond of me as he could be of anyone over ten years old'.⁶⁴ The implication – that he had very little interest in anyone over that age – was simply untrue, and her own experience contradicted it, so we are left wondering why she said it. Was it, as a recent online commentator has suggested, a reflection on a private joke between her and Dodgson?⁶⁵ Or had she, like Ruth Gamlen and in defiance of common sense, truly started to remember the man that way?

By this form of voluntary, possibly unconscious or instinctive, self-editing by those who had known him, what had actually been only one part of Dodgson's reality – his child-friendships – continued to be distorted and extended to appear as if it was all there was; what had in fact been largely a myth created around Carroll was becoming progressively invested with apparent first-hand experiential support, but that support was itself largely illusory, seemingly created *from* the story it was allegedly supporting. There were a very few discordant voices, like that of Dodgson's old friend Bea Hatch, reminding the public that some of his 'child-friends' were actually 'married women with children of their own'⁶⁶ and Anne Thackeray Ritchie, whose relationship with Dodgson remains almost entirely unexplored, begging that his kindness to 'old children' should not be forgotten.⁶⁷ But they were presenting a version of the narrative that was simply out of sync with the public appetite for Carroll and which was therefore rendered weightless and invisible. Few seemed to hear, and no one wanted to remember. It is interesting also to note that Ritchie employs that odd, diminishing and cutesy description 'old children' to define herself and his other adult female friends. It seems an almost painful, if not slightly demeaning, attempt not to be seen as contradicting the prevailing group-think. Was it really so impossible to associate Carroll with any kind of female that was not a child? Did adult women really feel the need to return themselves to the nursery simply in order to feel able to say they had befriended him?

It is perhaps to some extent understandable why those who had loved Carroll might be amenable to remembering him as far more uncomplicated

and far more saintly than he really was. It seems less easy to explain in non-Jungian terms why his enemies might feel compelled to do the same. Yet it seems that even those who had not liked him – such as Harry Furniss, Lewis Carroll's rotund illustrator for his last book, or his Oxford contemporary William Tuckwell – were drawn into the developing fantasy. None of his most vitriolic detractors attacked the veridical reality of the man they had known; instead they worked themselves into a lather of resentment, attacking and mocking and even further developing the legend.

Furniss was a short, overweight and wittily vitriolic man, an artist and illustrator, who nursed a grievance against Dodgson dating from the time they had collaborated over Carroll's last work, *Sylvie and Bruno*. Furniss suffered something of a humiliation at Dodgson's hands, and after Dodgson's death he seems to have decided to use his memoir to settle the score. Printed in 1901, it tells the story of their confrontation from Furniss's point of view with a copious sprinkling of vinegar.

Furniss describes Dodgson as almost impossible to work with – vain and excessively demanding. He says that after years of almost superhuman endurance he had finally had enough and decided to call Dodgson's bluff by 'pretending' to resign. 'I wrote to Carroll the author declining to complete the work.' According to Furniss's memoir, this provoked a 'pathetic' letter from Dodgson apologizing for all the difficulties he had put Furniss through and imploring him to carry on with his commission. Triumphant, Furniss magnanimously agreed to do so.⁶⁸

But letters from Dodgson to Furniss that have come to light over the past half-century show the reality behind Furniss's funny story. They show that there was indeed such a confrontation between the two men as Furniss describes, but the way in which it actually proceeded was radically different from Furniss's recollection.

The correspondence shows that Furniss's 'pretend' letter of resignation was not a joke at all but a real and rather unpleasant piece of blackmail. He threatened to publish Dodgson's private letters and even to take him to court unless Dodgson immediately released him from his contract to illustrate the book. Subsequent developments show that he did not really want to stop working for Dodgson but that this was some tactic for getting more money or some added artistic leverage. And it turned out to be a big mistake.

Dodgson immediately responded by asking another artist to do the work for him. He wrote to Furniss accepting his resignation, taking up the threat to go public and throwing it back at him.

I am not quite so foolish as to believe that Art-work, extorted by legal process, would be worth anything at all. So I release you from all your engagements ... But ... the rest of your letter is simply delightful to me!

For a good many years ... I have projected a magazine-article ... on the subject of 'Authors' Difficulties with Illustrators': but I did not see my way to bringing it out with any *raison d'être*. This *you* have just given me: and I thank you sincerely for doing so. *You* shall have your say first; and my paper will come out ... as an answer to yours. I not only authorise you to print the '5 pages' of my letter ... I call upon you to do so.⁶⁹

Furniss reacted to this with panic. He had not wanted to resign and had no intention of going public; also he probably quickly realized he was hopelessly outclassed. Anyone who engaged in a war of words with Dodgson was almost certainly going to lose. All he could do was write back in a tone of abject apology, saying he had not meant any of the things he had said, imploring his rival not to go public and asking for his job back. It was Furniss, not Dodgson, who was forced to grovel pathetically and Dodgson, not Furniss, who agreed magnanimously to let things go, in a letter of sweetly understated but deadly triumph.

Of course I won't publish the now-so-happily-ended controversy, as you think it would damage you to such a fearful extent! I had quite understood that the challenge proceeded from *you* ...⁷⁰

For Furniss it represented complete humiliation. It is perfectly understandable that resentment festered in Furniss and perfectly understandable that he waited until so dangerous an opponent was safely dead before risking any further reprisals, but the manner in which he chose to settle an old score is remarkable. Furniss was evidently not above dishing the dirt, and providence had left one weapon of character assassination in his hands, in the shape of Dodgson's indiscreet friendships of which Furniss had some first-hand experience. At least one of Dodgson's young women – a seventeen-year-old convent girl called Charlotte Rix – had been brought by

Dodgson, unchaperoned, to Furniss's studio. Her breathless awe at being taken out by 'the great Lewis,' as she termed him, comes tumbling out of the long letter she wrote her mother after the incident.⁷¹ She was most clearly stunned and charmed by this older, urbane and famous man and equally stunned by being in a real artist's studio. Her awe and her naïvety as well as her unchaperoned seventeen-year-old vulnerability must have been more than apparent to Furniss. It seems too obvious that such a not-very principled man would use this little interlude (perhaps without naming names) and other bits of gossip to get his revenge on the reputedly unworldly saint and 'ethereal being' by showing him to be mortal and a potential sinner.

But no. For perhaps the same reason that led Ellen Terry to say, and maybe even believe, that her dead friend had had no interest in 'anyone over the age of ten' Furniss rejected this potentially injurious anecdote in favour of fashionably demoting 'Carroll' to childhood. He dipped into his own experience to tell not about nubile girlfriends but amusing stories of 'managing' and controlling a man who was barmy, egoistical but essentially harmless, a 'simple innocent dreamer of children.'⁷²

This suggests the possibility that Furniss sensed instinctively, possibly unconsciously, the power and pitch of the 'Carroll' mythos; sensed perhaps that trying to deconstruct it might be an unwise idea. Beloved icons can be Teflon-coated and even reflective; doubts or questions raised about them can rebound on to the questioner, and reputations can be lost that way. Would the public easily forgive someone who tried to violate the image of the chaste, virtuous, naïve and innocent St Lewis? Perhaps Furniss was astute enough to recognize that if he had published anecdotes of 'Lewis Carroll' courting scandal with young women he would probably have been dismissed and disgraced as a rumour-monger or simply ignored, his narrative, however accurate, falling between the gaps in human awareness as something no one was prepared even to acknowledge as possible. Better to take revenge in a safer mode, within the sanctuary of the accepted image. And, in fact, whether he knew it or not, his memoir of Carroll was ultimately the most complete vengeance he could exact. He helped, in his own way, to rob Charles Dodgson of his own experiential reality.

The same can be said of William Tuckwell, a Fellow of New College, who wrote his memoirs within two years of Lewis Carroll's death. He had not been in residence at Oxford since 1864, but it is hard to believe that he knew nothing about the more controversial realities of Dodgson's existence – the late-night dinners in his rooms with various ladies, the young women models photographed in 'bathing dress', the kissing of seventeen-year-old Atty Owen. As with Furniss, Tuckwell's evident dislike of the man gave him impetus to remember the worst, and indeed his memoir did a savage job of mocking Dodgson. But, again like Furniss, and perhaps for similar reasons, he chose to mock the legend rather than the reality. He was witty about Dodgson's supposed exclusive attachment to small girls, joking about all the friendships with 'little misses' that ended with the end of childhood as soon as 'brook and river meet' and about Dodgson himself as 'a grown-up child' whose personality shrank from adult contact. He seemed to believe it; perhaps he did – perhaps for him it was now true. But it had evidentially never been true for Dodgson.⁷³

So, by the early twentieth century Carroll and his 'little misses', Carroll the quasi-Christ figure with his collection of innocent Magdalens, the study in eccentricity who avoided adulthood and adult situations had become so 'real' that it was even being satirized, while his other reality, the one he apparently thought he had lived, was fading ever farther from remembrance. Already the image was so pervasive that people could say (as they so often do): 'Well, if everyone says this it must have something in it'; an admirable sentiment that, to paraphrase Fielding, has just one major objection – namely, that it is not true. Alas, democracy may be many things, but a test of reality is not one of them. A thousand people can be just as deluded as one; in fact, often a great deal more so.

On all sides personal experience of Charles Dodgson had given way to a kind of irresistible fiction. Memory was being relocated as myth without anyone seeming to notice the transition. Tuckwell began his reminiscence with an observation that shrewdly summed up the prevailing mood. Lewis Carroll, he said, had been 'Isabowmanised to the nth'.⁷⁴ He did not seem to realize that he had been, too.

Meanwhile, the material of Dodgson's life that might have helped to redress the balance remained at once circumvented and out of reach. And

those who knew best about the man as he had really been – his own family, his closest women-friends such as Constance Burch and Theo Heaphy and the ‘real’ Alice’s family, the Liddells – preserved their silence and left the storytelling to those who often had least to tell. While *Alice* came out of copyright and into different editions all over the world; while it was turned into an early movie (Cecil Hepworth, 1903) and who knows how many pastiches and satires, Lewis Carroll’s ten siblings lived quietly, saying nothing, and died one after the other. Curiously, no one who had known him in domestic intimacy was seemingly prepared to share those memories with a biographer. Only one of his own generation – his youngest and obviously very loyal and loving sister Henrietta – left any personal memories of him at all, and this was an intensely deeply felt and touchingly sincere half page – about his kindness to animals.⁷⁵ The rest was silence and was to remain so for many years.

Perhaps his brothers and sisters preferred the evolving myth to any closer investigation of his life and aspects they would rather were forgotten. Perhaps others who had known and loved Dodgson most closely recognized that their memories were simply too incompatible with what the public were prepared to be told and so chose silence in preference to turning him into ‘Carroll’ yet again. For whatever reason, the place where should have been found the most intimate and revealing stories about Dodgson the big brother or Dodgson the trusted friend remained blank, thus reinforcing the idea that a blank, a zero, was all there was at the heart of the man. Alice Liddell – the notional ‘real Alice’ – did not break her silence until 1932 and then with obvious reluctance, recording (or, more accurately, allowing her son to record) one lukewarm little memoir of the ‘golden afternoon’ that very much traded off the received image and even borrowed from previous ‘little girl’ narratives, such as Isa Bowman’s.⁷⁶ Rather obviously designed to chime in with the Lewis Carroll centenary market, there was little that was personal or in any way revealing of the deeper reality of her knowledge of the man (although curiously what there was implied an undercurrent of resentment or spite towards him, as we shall see later), which must have gone well beyond the publicly owned mythology. Yet from now on that mythology could appear, on superficial analysis, to have the endorsement of the ‘real Alice’ herself.

Only one additional biography appeared between 1899 and 1932, and that was Belle Moses's *Lewis Carroll in Wonderland and at Home: The Story of His Life*, which appeared in 1910. Moses had a fatally fey style, more in keeping with fiction than history, and there was no new material in her book. Indeed, how could there be? It was little more than a restating of the basic outline created by Collingwood and the blossoming mythology, complete with the stories of virtue and the by now familiar empty space where the details of a real life would be expected to be.

The Freudians and the Apologists

Tweedledum and Tweedledee

Agreed to have a battle

– Traditional song

THE centenary year of Lewis Carroll's birth – 1932 – saw an explosion of interest and a consequent rush of magazine articles about the author's life of varying but never very great accuracy. The stream of ageing 'little girls' striving to record their special place in Carroll's life became, briefly, a torrent. In addition to the Alice Liddell 'memoir', there were contributions in the form of letters to newspapers or articles in magazines from Isabel Standen, her sister Alice, Rose Wood, Alice Wilson Fox, Evelyn Hatch, Winifred Holiday and several more. Some of these had known Dodgson well, others only in passing or hardly at all, yet for all of them it was now thirty-four years since the reality of Dodgson had been available, and their memories were being overgrown ever more densely by the mythology. The small, nervous dissent of the likes of Anne Thackeray had been airbrushed away; even the clouded greys of Collingwood's biography, the hints of deeper things, were being softly erased as the image continued generating itself in line with apparent public need. It would have been hard for anyone confronted with such blanket certitude to be sure of what was real or not inside their own minds, and it is not surprising that these women continued the tradition of quasi-religious celebration of a unique scholar-saint that was already the norm.

Probably few were consciously inventing material, and some of them may even have conveyed some accurate images, but a picture that is only half complete and yet is presented as if it were whole must inevitably be fraudulent. The memoirs, sincere as they probably were, were telling their stories from within an essentially false paradigm that denied most of the

complex reality of Charles Dodgson, his life and emotional entanglements, and they were telling it in increasingly simplistic and mythic terms, so that anyone who read them and accepted them as the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth must end up wildly deceived.

It was in the midst of this brief blizzard of little-girl memoirs that two new biographies appeared: Walter de la Mare's *Lewis Carroll* and Langford Reed's *The Life of Lewis Carroll*.

Born in England in 1873, de la Mare was well known as a poet and novelist and was also the main critic of the *Times Literary Supplement* for many years. He had previously written studies of M.E. Coleridge and his friend the poet Rupert Brooke, among a torrent of other literature. His analysis of Lewis Carroll was slight and concentrated chiefly on his artistry. It is not known whether he attempted to gain access to any new documentation about Dodgson's life, but if he did try he failed. In the absence of anything new he could merely resketch in the old, and this he did. But at least he largely resisted the temptation to make up what he did not know. Alas, the same cannot be said for the second biographer of 1932, Herbert Langford Reed.

*

Langford Reed, born in England in 1889, was a screenwriter, film editor and, like de la Mare, a humourist, but a rather less famous one; he was also a contributor to the satirical magazine *Punch* and a broadcaster. In 1925 he published *The Complete Limerick Book*, which, among other things, endeavoured to trace the history of this popular verse form, and the following year he published an anthology of *Nonsense Verse and Prose* that featured some of Carroll's writing. In 1937, five years after he produced his study of Lewis Carroll, he contributed a children's story called 'Blue Bread and Butter' to *Jolly Jack's Annual*. He claimed to be attracted to the contemplation of Carroll by a powerful and – one might think when one reads his introductory poem – somewhat optimistic sense of fellow feeling. In the grip of this and other passions he wrote *The Life of Lewis Carroll*.¹ Unlike de la Mare, whose book did little to change or develop the received image of Carroll, Reed's biography, in its self-confident scarlet binding and

gold lettering, launched itself with great dash and was to prove one of the great influences on modern thinking about the man who wrote *Alice*.

One central puzzle about Reed and his biography is the exact nature of his relationship with the Dodgson family, who, of course, continued to crouch protectively over nearly all the important documentation of Carroll's life, including his thirteen volumes of diaries. We know Reed contacted the family, but it is not clear whether they gave him information or not. Reed hints that they did; however, a letter from Menella Dodgson, Carroll's niece, to a family friend claims they were tight-lipped and made sure he 'left as ignorant as he came'.² This seems odd when set against the fact that Reed dedicated his book to Menella's nieces 'My Little Friends Georgie and Carroll Dodgson' and effusively thanked Menella and other members of her family 'for the valuable co-operation which has been given me in connection with the many unpublished letters I have been privileged to examine and quote'.³ Was Reed simply being cheekily misinformative and trying to give the impression that his book was a great deal closer to the horse's mouth than it really was? Or when Menella claimed to be making sure he 'left as ignorant as he came' was she hinting at something a little more proactive than simply turning him away? Can it be that the family actually fed the unfortunate, importunate Reed little bits of misinformation for reasons of their own? As we shall see, this is a possibility that cannot entirely be discounted. However, it is worth noting that, although Reed claims to have seen unpublished letters, he does not quote any of them, nor does he make a single reference to diary entries that had not already been published in Collingwood's book; so any access he was given must have been almost entirely insignificant.

If Reed had wanted to make a new, thorough analysis of Dodgson's life he would probably have been prevented by the family's determination to keep him ignorant by whatever method they chose. But his book makes it clear that this was never his intention. It made little attempt at being a serious work of history: there was no index, no bibliography, no proper indication of sources, and indeed he stated in his foreword that he was deliberately leaving an attempt at proper biography to 'a more "academic" pen than mine'.⁴ This was probably wise since his grasp of what few biographical facts he had at his disposal was tenuous at best, and his work

was littered with quite elementary mistakes. Oddly he attributed to Dodgson a professorship he had never acquired, saying in a footnote that, although he knew Dodgson had never been a professor, he, Reed, would call him one because 'he was one to all intents and purposes.'⁵ This is a reasonably good summary of the style and mindset underpinning his book's entire construction. Reed had, by his own admission, no interest in being scholarly and little care for verifiable fact; what exercised him and motivated him was 'Carroll' the legend.

Reed was apparently aspiring to be a member of that strangest of Victorian cults, the Child-Worshippers. He seemingly very much wanted to revere the purity of little girls, and in Carroll he found his socially acceptable pre-Freudian means of doing so. His entire narrative was predicated on his belief that Dodgson personified his own – quite odd – idea of virtue, which involved an adoration of the female child and a positive dislike or avoidance of adult women who might be dangerous sources of sexual temptation. In pursuance of establishing this image, Reed availed himself freely of the large source of material written by Dodgson's 'ex-childfriends' in Collingwood's biography and elsewhere, but crucially none of this source material suggested Dodgson had ever wilfully disliked or avoided adult women. If Reed wanted to add this dimension he would need to invent it; and so he did. In fact his entire text demonstrated the blurry indifference to the distinction between veridical reality and his own imagination that would become the hallmark of Carroll biography for some time. His 'new material' was simply a collection of anecdotes, some of which could be sourced and some of which appear to have been his own invention entirely.

There was a story of Lewis Carroll spilling change from his pocket all over someone's hall floor, which can be sourced back to the Dodgson family and, more eccentrically, of his entering the house where he believed a children's party to be in progress on all fours and growling like a bear, only to discover he was at the wrong address, which seems to have a similar source but is probably apocryphal.⁶

He also told more improbable anecdotes, including the story of Dodgson vanishing from college for two days, only to be discovered tending a Christ Church servant who was dying of typhoid.⁷ The mere fact that these stories were given without source, vaguely ascribed to anonymous 'friends' or other

convenient ghost-sources impossible to verify, is enough to make it probable they are apocryphal.

But it was the nature of Dodgson's interaction with females that lay at the heart of his story (as it lay at the heart of the mythology), and it was here that Reed performed his most vital service to the legend. He took Collingwood's original and changed it in a small but crucial way. The statement in Collingwood that 'in a large proportion of cases, the [child-friendships] ended with the end of childhood'⁸ became in Reed: 'His interest in his child-friends usually ceased when they were about fourteen.'⁹

This changed the meaning of Collingwood's original in an important way. Collingwood's original, while distorting the picture and de-emphasizing the presence of women in Dodgson's life, had not attempted to suggest that his child-friendships ended because Dodgson *wanted* them to, indeed he even allowed the truth – that Dodgson was very interested in befriending women – to peek through to a small extent. Reed, motivated by we don't know what personal and Jungian promptings, entirely ignored (or perhaps didn't see) the passing references to women-friends and added a new level of meaning by claiming that Dodgson's 'interest' in his child-friends ceased when they attained physical maturity.

So, from being a man who loved children but who was still permitted to like women – as Collingwood portrayed the situation – 'Carroll' became a man who loved *only* children and lost interest in them when they became physically mature. The rejection of the adult female that is now a cornerstone 'truth' of the orthodox picture of Carroll was thus created in its entirety by Langford Reed, writer of Nonsense and minor biographer, for reasons we can only guess at, although it seems most probable he was simply conferring his own misogyny on to his hero.

Reed indeed went further than merely suggesting that Dodgson lost interest in post-pubescent girls. For whereas Collingwood had left the question of Charles Dodgson's adult love life open, and even hinted at the existence of at least one love affair behind 'the veil' of his reticence, Reed entirely overwrote this ambiguity to claim that Dodgson 'never had a love affair, or even any flirtations'. Perhaps tellingly he added: 'I am assured by Major Dodgson [Charles H.W. Dodgson, Menella's brother] and by Miss F. Menella Dodgson that in all the very revealing matter discovered in his

numerous diaries there is not the slightest suggestion that he either felt or inspired any pangs of the tender passion ...'¹⁰

When we remember Menella's claim to have made sure Reed left her 'as ignorant as he came', then we might feel a slight pang for what might have been Reed's naïve and trusting confidence here. The family will not let him see the man's diaries, yet he entirely accepts their word about what they will not let him see. The reason he does this is probably the universal human one – he is being told what he seems to want to hear, and so he is primed to accept it. Reed was predisposed to believe in a loveless and virginal Dodgson, as indeed were almost all the adherents to the growing 'cult' of Carroll, so when Dodgson's relatives told him his gut feeling was true he was happy to ignore Collingwood and repeat their assurance as if it was fact.

And so it became official. Lewis Carroll never had a love affair.

Yet even this was not enough for Reed. Developing his claim for a demonstrably sexless Carroll, he claimed that even his love poems treated love 'as a spiritual development ... and not as a physical, or even a social or domestic one.'¹¹

Considering the texts of this love poetry, in particular the curious and intense 'Stolen Waters', with its heavy invocation of desire, seduction, illicit 'pleasure', 'sweet delirious pain' and subsequent guilt, it seems hard to understand how even Reed could read them as *not* depicting physical, sexual love. Did he even read these poems? Or was he, like Ruth Gamlen who met Carroll in company with a woman but 'remembered' a child, so blinded that he could contrive to see black as white and 'sweet delirious' sex as a 'spiritual development'?

But this was only easing his readers in. For there was more. Not only was Reed assured and therefore certain that Dodgson never had a love affair and only wrote 'spiritual' love poems. Not only was he sure that almost all Dodgson's child-friendships stopped when the girls reached fourteen, because Dodgson 'lost interest', he also knew, on the basis of what we know not what misinformation, that Carroll 'deliberately discouraged ... friendship with grown girls he had known as children, in the conviction that such association could only injure the memory of the idealistic comradeship he had exchanged with them before they had acquired any adult worldliness or sophistication'.

Reed quoted the experience of Mary Brown as if it offered proof of the truth of this. As Reed told it, when she reached the usual cut-off age of fourteen, Mary was still keen to continue her friendship with Dodgson and made repeated efforts to continue their friendship but 'was successful only so far as correspondence was concerned'.¹²

This, Reed assured his audience, was typical. Whenever any mature child-friend attempted to 'keep the flame of friendship alive' Dodgson chose to 'exchange correspondence with them on the subject of their spiritual welfare [rather] than to renew their former intimacy'. According to Reed, who intended to be taken seriously, Lewis Carroll preferred to deal with all females over a certain age by letter only.¹³

Reed's use of Mary Brown was massively disingenuous. It was true enough that she and Dodgson never met after she grew up. She lived over three hundred miles away in Scotland. Unsurprisingly, therefore, they did have an 'entirely correspondence-based' friendship. But in this Mary Brown was unique among the tens, if not hundreds, of women that brightened Dodgson's life. Wherever Reed obtained his ideas of a man who avoided adult women, it was not from anything in the recorded history of Dodgson's life nor even from Collingwood's biography; it was simply an invention. The question of whether the invention was Reed's or whether it may have been part of Menella Dodgson's bid to keep him ignorant of her uncle's real nature and activities is significant but unanswerable.

Reed's second major contribution to the modern biographical picture of Lewis Carroll was his central belief that Charles Dodgson and Lewis Carroll had actually been two separate people lodged in one body. This curious conviction was the paradigm within which his biography was lodged and more or less underpinned everything he wrote. He claimed to be 'not greatly interested' in Charles Dodgson and that his book was 'little concerned' with him – which indeed was true. His interest was entirely focused on 'Lewis Carroll', by which he seemed to mean the collection of attributes and ideas that he wished to believe 'Carroll' had possessed. It seems that his own obsessions flood the pages, and he shapes his Carroll into a being by which he can give them expression and thereby find relief and affirmation.

In this, he was merely the first of many, as a developing aspect of the myth became Carroll's universal appeal to those seeking a scapegoat for

aspects of themselves, be they covert child-lovers or merely those who felt in some way dispossessed. If Salieri was the patron saint of mediocrities, it was to fall to Carroll to become the patron saint of the frustrated and the ‘unhappily different’.

On the subject of the ‘split’ he thought he saw between Dodgson and Carroll, and which was the foundation of his book, Reed was emphatic. He envisioned Charles Dodgson to have been ‘a grave and studious boy, who had developed into a grave and studious young man, with no liking for any of the usual pleasures of youth or for any form of physical exercise save for long solitary walks’.

Even Collingwood was happy to acknowledge that young Charles could ‘use his fists’ in a fight and had an interest in cricket, so there was little basis for this extreme portrayal. But Reed had a story to develop. In his imagination this grave boy had undergone a curious, possibly mystic transformation around the year 1857, when, magically, ‘A curious and subtle change had been taking place in his nature. The grave and studious boy ... began to exhibit a youthfulness of spirit, which astonished his friends.’ He was becoming ‘Mr Carroll’, an alternate persona that asserted itself despite ‘Professor Dodgson’s’ attempt to suppress it.

Fortunately for the world, says Reed, Mr Carroll’s personality was stronger than the personality of Mr Dodgson, so much so that strangers who met him often recognized the former and ignored the latter.¹⁴

If Reed truly believed what he was writing in a literal sense we have cause to doubt his mental balance. Perhaps he intended to be whimsical and Carrollian, but there doesn’t seem much sign that he thought it was a joke. Indeed, he seems in quite deadly earnest. Not only did he have the evolution of the split personality worked out, he also knew exactly *why* ‘Mr Carroll’ had begun to develop when he did – it was, says Reed, because he met Alice Liddell, whose ‘elfin-like’ and ‘spiritual’ qualities ‘struck a gay and dulcet chord in the heart of the grave young don’.

Of course he had no evidence for Alice Liddell having had any particular effect on Charles Dodgson at all. Where could he have found such evidence, since Dodgson’s personal papers were all but off limits to him? It was simply his personal take on the already burgeoning legend that the ‘real Alice’, Alice Liddell, had been extremely special to Charles Dodgson in some way.

This belief had been washing about the edges of Carroll's mythology for years. I have not been able to trace what precisely began it, but it was presumably inspired by the fact that the heroine of the two books had been named after the girl. On to this slight fact there had begun to be erected a growing legend that the 'Alice' of the story *was* Alice Liddell, and that she was uniquely, even magically, special to Charles Dodgson. The reason for this is not capable of simple explanation. Indeed, we shall need to look at it in depth elsewhere. Suffice to say that such a belief had been growing as the Carroll myth grew. Reed simply added his own particularly individual spin to it, so that according to him, by the time *Alice* was written the author had, thanks to Alice Liddell's elfin magic, become two totally separate people:

Mr Carroll, boyish, whimsical, eager, reciprocal, sociable, fond of recognition and intensely human; and Professor Dodgson, serious, donnish, mature, shy, aloof, egotistic, easily-offended and displaying very little interest in other adult people, including Mr Carroll, with whom he invariably disclaimed relationship.¹⁵

And it was with these impeccable credentials that Lewis Carroll's 'split personality' became grafted into the legend. Conjured out of the air by Reed's curious, driven imagining, the only possible basis for even a tiny part of it was Dodgson's reluctance to admit to being Lewis Carroll when fans wrote to his home address or tried to 'out' him in company. There is nothing anywhere to suggest that Dodgson was ever crazy enough to consider Lewis Carroll to be a different person or that the name was anything but a simple *nom de plume*, like 'Mark Twain' or 'George Eliot'. Quite understandably, this very famous man used it to try to reduce to a minimum the unwanted attention of fans and lion-hunters into his private life. So why, if we can let that be a sufficiently good reason for Sam Clemens and Mary Ann Evans to adopt another name, can't we let that be good enough for Charles Dodgson? Why are we not comfortable with permitting him to have been normal?

This question takes us to the heart of what the mythology is really about, which, of course, is not Charles Dodgson at all but our collective need for symbols or archetypes. It may be thanks to Reed and his prolonged riff on 'Professor Dodgson and Mr Carroll' that we now have the biographical 'fact' that there was something strange about Dodgson and his pseudonym, but

Reed's quite insane idea would not have run and run if we did not want to perpetuate it. It was we who created two separate individuals where there was only one. The schism is ours as much as Reed's and not Dodgson's at all.

When Reed's book was published in 1932 it represented a moment of profound change in the perception of Lewis Carroll. He followed Collingwood closely but only up to a point. There was a single difference between them, and that difference has distinguished almost every biographer who has written since. Collingwood had been manipulating the evidence but for understandable reasons of his own. He was clearly anxious to disguise certain aspects of his uncle's life from the reading public for fear of damaging his uncle's and his family's Christian reputation should the ambiguous truth be known. But he had no apparent desire to create the kind of Carroll that Reed was trying to portray. He had not tried to expunge every possibility of an emotional life or mature experience; he had merely drawn a veil over them, as his writings made plain. He was prepared to admit the potential existence of a mature Carroll; he simply preferred that no details should be revealed.

Reed discarded all this delicate avoidance for something much starker and more familiar to modern readers. Where Collingwood had told superficial stories of Victorian virtue, Reed reproduced them faithfully. But where Collingwood had gently implied hidden depths, Reed expunged the implication and replaced it with a zero, a nothing. And so the biography with a gap where a life had been discreetly avoided became a biography without a life in it – and this was what Reed handed down to posterity, even to those who had never read his book nor heard of him. Collingwood had left us with an emptiness where a living man ought to have been; Reed sewed up the wound and eliminated the excision from our awareness, and over the scar he pasted a garish and unbelievable caricature, 'Mr Carroll'. From this point on the silly superficialities allowed by Collingwood were not just a diversion – they were all there was or ever had been. The idea of anything missing, of depths unexplored, became not just erased, it became unthinkable, heretical, crazy. From now on, as an article of faith, 'Carroll' would *have* to be defined wholly by the grotesque carnival mask of his incredible superficial mythology. This portrait, a stark, ossified version of Collingwood with the added suppressed sexual-religious hysteria donated

by the accumulation of memoirs from the adoring handmaidens, the added (although presumably unintentional) note of genuine psychological disturbance provided by the quite gratuitous introduction of a 'dual personality' and the even more gratuitous implied fastidious physical distaste for adult womanhood, more than any other single book, this was the one that gave us our modern idea of Lewis Carroll. The image of the 'split personality' and the touching story of Dodgson nursing dying servants are still routinely quoted in the best academic biographies.¹⁶ And it is from Reed that we have received the certitude routinely repeated that Dodgson had no experience of love. Reed's image quickly gained uncritical acceptance, and its ideas spread beyond anyone who had read the words into the fabric of the human collective unconscious, where it burrowed and nestled and made itself at home and was retold countless times by people who had no idea of the origin of the things they were saying. Repetition in turn created firmer belief, and so it went on. So that when the sea-change in the Lewis Carroll legend arrived within a year of Reed's publication it was the meaning of it all that was challenged. The 'facts' of his generalized and extreme eccentricity, his odd duality, his naïve unworldliness, his loveless and sexless emotional life and, of course, his exclusive fixation on pre-pubescent children were accepted wholesale.

✱

Viewed historically, Reed's last stand for nineteenth-century innocence is almost tragic-comic, digging in the seeds of its own destruction with its endless deceptive anthem of purity and little girls. The time for such things was over. This was 1932. The Great War had come and gone; another war was threatening, Depression was biting and Sigmund Freud had written his books about dreams. Reed's *Life of Lewis Carroll* was not twelve months old in its brave red binding before the new age, asserting its own right to see its legends in its own way, had taken up the little girls but thrown away the purity.

The Victorians had saints; the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have psychological disorders. And, like every age, we take our own delusions as the proof of our enlightenment. For us, locked in the prison of our materialism, as disgruntled as a child who has just discovered the non-

existence of Santa Claus and who knows Christmas will never be the same again, 'Carroll' has become the proof that such aspirations are dangerous delusions. The modern age is too smart for innocence; it looks at purity with a smile and knows better. For the modern age reality means the worm in the bud. Things that spoke to the Victorians of naïvety and sweetness speak to us of hypocrisy and deviant, dangerous, repressed sexuality. The question of which of these images is the more 'real' is irrelevant. What is going on here has very little to do with reality.

The modern idea of Lewis Carroll as repressed sexual deviant was ushered quietly into existence by a young man called Anthony Goldschmidt. In 1933 he was an undergraduate at Balliol, a gifted student who had won himself an Exhibition. It was in that year that he turned his attention to the Lewis Carroll of Collingwood, Reed and legend. He studied the man presented there, with his endless succession of 'little girls', his social isolation, his apparent absence of any adult connection, and concluded that he was looking not at a saint or an ethereal being clothed for a while in mortal flesh but at a repressed paedophile.

In a sense this is quite understandable and more reasonable in its way than the hysterical pleas for 'innocence' propounded by Reed and the bevy of cultish 'child-friends'. There was indeed something unquestionably odd about this 'Carroll' who, apparently, had at least two different personalities and could bear to deal with adult women only by post.

Goldschmidt published his views in a four-page article in the *New Oxford Outlook* entitled 'Alice in Wonderland Psycho-Analysed'. The hyphens and capitals testify to the awkward newness of such a concept. His theory was that the opening section of *Wonderland* was a kind of cryptic message from Lewis Carroll's subconscious. The incidents were signs and symbols that could be decoded in the face of modern psychoanalytical understanding to reveal the inner workings of the author's mind: 'The whole course of the story is perhaps to be explained by the desire for complete virility, conflicting with the desire for abnormal satisfaction.'¹⁷

The fall down the rabbit hole was a symbol of sexual penetration; the doors surrounding the hallway represented female genitalia. The doors of normal size represent adult women. These are disregarded by the dreamer, and interest is centred on the little door, which symbolizes a female child;

the curtain in front of it represents the child's clothes ... In selecting the little door in preference to the big one Alice (or rather Dodgson in the guise of Alice) was choosing to copulate with a female child instead of an adult woman. Ergo, he was a paedophile.

Goldschmidt continued:

The colourful language suggests the presence, in the subconscious, of an abnormal emotion of considerable strength. There can be no doubt, historically speaking, that this emotion was completely repressed, and that Lewis Carroll's relations with his child-friends were of the most harmless and delightful kind. Equally there can be little doubt of its subconscious existence. Lewis Carroll was an unmarried clergyman of the strictest 'virtue', and his abnormal instinct is therefore more clearly recognised, because scarcely complicated by other issues.

And then he added:

It is difficult to hold that his interest in children was inspired by a love of childhood in general, and in any case based on a mental rather than physical attraction, in view of two facts: that he detested little boys ... and that his friendships almost invariably ended with the close of childhood.¹⁸

So, with the publication of this article the mythology entered a new phase. Carroll and his fervently religious, sexually empty life entirely given over to little girls became converted into a pathology. And thus did the lovingly constructed defences of a sacred reputation become the snares of a worse infamy than poor Collingwood could have envisaged. The whole affair is given an air of added confusion and poignancy by the possibility that Goldschmidt may have meant his article as a joke. His friend and fellow Carroll scholar Derek Hudson claimed that his 'tongue was halfway into his cheek' when he wrote it. And Hudson may well have been in a position to know, as, according to his autobiography, he collaborated with Goldschmidt on another hoax just a few years later.¹⁹ Certainly the gentle send-up of all things Freudian did have something of a precedent in the Oxford of the inter-war years.²⁰

The impact of this possibility is considerable. For even if Goldschmidt never believed in it, many others did. If it had not been for him no one from the Freudian analyst Paul Schilder to the playwright Dennis Potter would

have had their images to play with. The influence of Goldschmidt's article can be found in almost everything that has been said about Carroll and his work for the past sixty-five years. If it was a joke it was one of the best.

Joke or not, the psychoanalysts had Carroll now, and with a little shaking, a little tenderizing, like Quint's shark, they swallowed him whole.

*

Over the Depression and war years, between the Jarrow March and the beginning of the Cold War, in a glorious effusion of attenuated inference and extraordinary syntax, the Freudians dissected Carroll and his works to the point of insanity. In fairness, it must be said that the composite image left behind by Collingwood, Bowman, Reed *et al.* of a childlike split personality, obsessively wearing his gloves and hat, visiting dentists every day and avoiding any female over the age of fourteen, would be hard to pass off as a well-adjusted personality even without a Freudian perspective. But not content with merely analysing this bizarre concoction, the Freudians commenced to add fresh layers of falsehood and confusion to the mix. Beginning with the premise coined by William Empson in *Some Versions of Pastoral* – 'To make the dream-story from which *Wonderland* was elaborated seem Freudian one has only to tell it' – the Freudian analysts seemed to believe that anything that they detected in the stories or could infer from them about Charles Dodgson's life must be true, because they were Freudian analysts, and proceeded from there.

'Flamingoes and mustard become the desires of the two sexes,' opined Empson. He thought it all came down to wombs:

the salt water [of the pool of tears] is the sea from which life arose; as a bodily product it is also the amniotic fluid ... The symbolic completeness of Alice's experience is, I think, important. She runs the whole gamut: she is a father in getting down the hole, a fetus at the bottom, and can only be born by becoming a mother and producing her own amniotic fluid.

Shrewdly, however, he had noticed one possible objection to all this. 'No doubt Dodgson would be indignant at having this meaning read into his symbols.' But he could reassure his readers that this did not matter because 'the meaning itself, if he had been intending to talk about the matter, is just

what he would have wished to say,'²¹ thus creating an oxymoron so perfect and seamless that reason falls dead at its feet.

Meanwhile, in another part of the forest: 'What was his relation to his sex organ anyway?' Paul Schilder demanded indignantly in 1938, going on to suggest with startling originality that Alice might have been a substitute penis. Not surprisingly, he and his colleagues considered the stories too disturbing for children.

When it came to the biography, the Freudians had read Langford Reed, so they could confidently assert highly Freudian 'facts' such as 'His interest in his child-friends usually ceased when they were about fourteen and he exchanged correspondence with them when they were older', and 'In his numerous diaries there is not the slightest suggestion of erotic interests. His friends, interviewed by Reed, testify in the same direction', and 'his childhood experiences as ... the oldest [sic] of eleven siblings'²² and even to risk syntactically challenging concepts such as 'his schizoid personality ... his regressive attitude and loving fascination by [sic] sexually undifferentiated child-actresses ...'

But not content with merely quoting the wisdom of the redoubtable scholar and scientist Langford Reed they also, just as confidently, added new Freudian 'facts' of their own, including, 'In his own life, Lewis Carroll was obliged to write with the right hand rather than the left', and 'his compulsive character traits, his often paranoid behaviour', and even discerned the little-known fact that 'his life seems to indicate that he ... wished to change himself into a small, adventurous girl'.²³

It is unclear exactly when or where the idea originated that Dodgson was left-handed and forced to write with his right hand with dire consequences for his psychological development. But it took its place as one of the key symbols of Lewis Carroll's tragic strangeness. The compulsive glove-wearing, hat-wearing, woman-hating schizoid recluse now had a problem with his handwriting as well.

The writings of the Freudians lay bare the immense and visceral power of Dodgson's literature and the mythology of his life. The psychoanalysts were its most absurd expression, but the extraordinary images from his writings, his words and his nonsense that seems heavy with a meaning always just out of reach, became implanted and continues to be implanted in

individuals who have never read his books. Somehow his literature succeeded, almost by accident, in defining something basic about the human condition, and we repaid it by obsessing over it with an apparently inexhaustible ability to find within Alice and Carroll a metaphor for almost anything and a symptom of almost every physical or psycho-neurotic disease.

Geza Roheim saw everything in Dodgson's life and work as a metaphor for latent cannibalism:

Lewis Carroll ... was the oldest child in the family, and he therefore had plenty of opportunity to feel jealous of his younger siblings and (we conjecture) to develop cannibalistic fantasies about the rivals who took his place with the mother ... the successive courses at the dinner represent the siblings whom Alice wanted to eat.²⁴

'We' might also conjecture that the equation of sibling rivalry and cannibalism tells us rather more about Roheim (and possibly his siblings) than Dodgson. In this fevered, fantasy-ridden ethos, the absence of evidence, which owing to the Dodgson family's secrecy continued to be nearly total, was considered evidence of almost anything. Entire theories were built on nothing but other theories, which might themselves be based on a misreading of a single sentence in Collingwood or a crazy assumption about what that person felt they knew was contained in the diaries no one was allowed to see. And through all the many and fevered insights the idea of Lewis Carroll's sexual preoccupation with little girls shone with a fixed and steady beam; the one immutable certainty, the leitmotif of his life and our time: his defining characteristic. The only question was why.

Human ingenuity, freed from the tiresome burden of reality, found no shortage of possible answers in a confusion of historically baseless womb analogies and images of frozen infantilism. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s Carroll's unavoidable psycho-pathology was confirmed again and again by authors mired in the pulsing mythology and increasingly detached from the bare biographical facts of his life, until sheer repetition began to confer upon them the mantle of credibility.

And then, in 1945, the first full biography to be published in some thirteen years picked up on the new Freudian concept of Lewis Carroll the

latent paedophile and expressed it with delicate but unavoidable emphasis.

Victoria Through the Looking-Glass, called simply *Lewis Carroll* in the UK, was written by Florence Becker Lennon. She was a poet and literary analyst who for some years broadcast a poetry programme on the radio from Boulder, Colorado. Over the years she wrote extensively about Lewis Carroll, and the publications of the principal Carroll societies have several examples of her work. But it was her biography that was to prove most enduringly influential.

Lennon was evidently a talented writer and an incisive observer, and she came to Carroll with possibly less agenda than any other writer had yet done. She was, in a sense, the first modern biographer, setting out to understand and explain her subject rather than illuminate a symbol. Uniquely for her own or any time before the present, and with truly impressive insight, she recognized the power of Carroll's mythological significance and its distorting effect on the biography. She saw him enshrined as 'the last saint of this irreverent world'. 'Those who have surrendered the myths of Santa Claus ... of Jehovah, hang their last remnants of mysticism on Lewis Carroll and will not allow themselves to examine him dispassionately.' She recognized the curious squeamishness that seemed to discourage so many later writers from looking beyond Collingwood's Victorian platitudes. She asked: 'What was his *autre monde*?' and recognized that 'Many Carrollians consider this question sacrilege.'

Thus armed with a rare insight into the power of the legend and its capacity to shape people's expectation and awareness without their even realizing it, she was well equipped to make a first attempt to look below the curious reflective surface of 'Carrollism' and record what she saw. Everything indicates that, unlike Collingwood, Bowman, Reed or indeed any previous writer on the subject of Carroll, Lennon was sincere in her attempt to bring this 'dispassionate' analysis to her subject. But she was let down by one overwhelming difficulty: she could only deal with the material at her disposal, and in 1945 it was painfully little, almost non-existent, because Carroll's family were still refusing to release his private papers. When her information was good she made a quite brilliant job of analysing it. But she was stymied from the outset by the continuing reluctance of the

Dodgsons and the Liddells to provide good documentation or even to talk openly to biographers. Inevitably, as a result, even her best efforts were going to be largely fruitless.

When she began her research in 1930, the elderly 'Alice' would not see her. There was one confused and equivocal interview with her older sister Lorina. The Dodgsons were polite but uncooperative. She was allowed no access to his diaries or the private family papers, and the only letters she could study were those she could track down. In these circumstances, her evidence was reduced to a tradition of mythology, riddled with fallacy and inaccuracy, dominated by psychoanalysis, in all its apotheosis of Freudian inference and womb-analogies and increasing detachment from any reality based on Dodgson's life.

The 'Lewis Carroll' presented for her inspection had become a hybrid of two antagonistic cultures: the 'eccentricities', which had themselves been quite deliberately over-emphasized if not largely invented by Collingwood, Bowman and Reed, had in a dainty twist now been transformed by the Freudians into obsessive-compulsive neuroses; the 'innocence' had become hysterical repression of sexual pathology. It is to be regretted that, through little fault of her own, Lennon's principal contribution was to use her talent and her skills to make this fantastic and tangled and largely fictional persona into something almost believable and to offer an explanation for it.

She had read Collingwood's seventy-two pages about the 'child-friends'; she could not know that half of these 'children' were in their teens or twenties. She had read Reed's portrait of a man who was obsessed with little girls and rejected womanhood; she could not know that this was a complete invention. She had also read Reed's claim that Dodgson 'never had a love affair, or even any flirtations'; she could not be expected to guess that Reed was basing this solely on what the Dodgson family had told him.

Even so, despite this avalanche of misinformation Lennon was still shrewd enough to pick up the small allusive reference by Collingwood from forty-seven years earlier that hints at the existence of at least one unhappy love affair in Lewis Carroll's life.

The closest hint of even a frustrated love affair with a grown woman is the justly famous quotation from Collingwood [about dead sanctities] ... No wonder broken hearts so rarely healed then – for some sort of broken heart is implied.

She noticed it and thought about it and picked up its meaning, but by this time Lennon was no longer in a position to see this comment as anything but largely irrelevant. All she was told about, all anyone was talking about, was the children. By now everyone *knew* that Charles Dodgson liked only little girls. So, she turned her back on Collingwood, who *had* known what he was talking about, and instead followed Reed, who manifestly hadn't, reprising almost word for word his invented claim that was already becoming the leitmotif of Carroll biography: 'He had no adult love life at all; his family have assured all inquirers that there is no evidence of any love, frustrated or otherwise, in his diaries.'

Given what she was told, her conclusions were almost inevitable. She almost had to see Charles Dodgson as a man who could not, or would not, grow up. So in her elegant and incisive style she developed the picture she was receiving, telling her readers: 'Carroll protested audibly when his child-friends matured ... and he claimed that he "lost" his friends when they grew up and became "uninteresting"', and 'His love life was confined to these spiritualized relationships with little girls – plus insomnia.'

She saw 'Peter Pan'. She saw a sad, disjointed man with 'his emotional clock ... jammed' in incessant childhood, who had no interest in and could not form adult relationships, who 'protested audibly when his child-friends matured', who was, in effect, an emotionally retarded paedophile.

In a defining sentence she announced the coming of age of the new orthodoxy: 'People have wondered what he did with his love-life. Now it can be told. He loved little girls.'

And, having thus so delicately and devastatingly established his paedophilic tendencies, her conclusion that 'nothing in his published writings shows an adult understanding of love' followed very naturally.²⁵

Lennon was convinced of the truth of this, and her conviction coloured everything she said about his life and, perhaps more importantly, his work. Lennon was the first biographer to bring anything like proper analysis to Lewis Carroll's creative life, the first to give any consideration to any work of his besides the two *Alice* books and perhaps *The Hunting of the Snark*. It seemed to have become part of the legend that Lewis Carroll had never written anything else. Lennon was the first to consider the *Sylvie and Bruno* novels and the serious poetry. Because no biographer had ever done so

before, her views were to be highly influential. She set the tone for almost everything that was to be said about these works thereafter. And everything she believed about his life influenced her understanding of his work.

If one begins with a belief in a man 'with no adult love life' it is only a small step to the conclusion that his published writings show no 'adult understanding of love'. Therefore, when she analysed his love poetry she almost had to find it unbelievable. After all, how could Peter Pan describe mature sexual love? How could Lewis Carroll, an eternal child, locked in the prison of his manifold strangenesses, possibly write about adult passion? It was a laughable idea, and Lennon laughed at it.

She tore through his love poems with a devastating contempt; witty, vitriolic, almost cruel, almost hysterical. Her dismissal was wholesale; she took no prisoners; her conclusions were absolute. Lewis Carroll's serious work was the inky trash of an immature mind. It had no story to tell but the tale of his own inadequacy.

It would be nice if life were so simple and our best work was always our truest. But autobiography is liable to be found in dross as much as anywhere else. Anyway, Dodgson's serious poetry is nothing as simple as dross. It is uneven, it is strange, but it has both artistic merit and considerable biographical significance. Its wholesale and continued dismissal has had a serious effect on the progress of understanding his life. It has helped cement the idea in the academic and popular mind that *Alice* is Carroll and that Carroll, in his entirety, is *Alice*.

This crushing indictment still stands for most modern analysts. It helped persuade several generations of scholarship entirely to ignore Lewis Carroll's serious poetry as an expression of his art or as a source of biographical insight. This has had the bizarre result that, while the *Alice* books have been picked bare for the tiniest nuance of accidental autobiography or strangely encoded confession, his serious poetry and massive two-volume novel have received hardly any attention, the assumption being, as Lennon expressed it, that everything but *Alice* is simply 'too bad to be based on personal experience' (implying presumably that Shakespeare once had family troubles in Denmark or that Coleridge at some time in his life must have spent a long time at sea with an albatross round his neck).²⁶

Lennon's second major contribution to her subject concerned Carroll's most famous child-friend of all time: Alice Liddell, the 'real Alice', the little girl in the boat who had inspired genius. The confusion of reality and fantasy that had welded Alice and Carroll in the public mind had likewise blended 'Alice' the fictional heroine and her real-life namesake. No one, least of all biographers, seemed clear where one left off and the other began. Collingwood had encapsulated the real Alice's perceived significance in a few sentences that defined her role in the official biography. For him she was Carroll's 'first child-friend' whose 'innocent talk was one of the chief pleasures of his early life at Oxford, and to whom he told the tale that was to make him famous'.²⁷

Outside the confines of the Dodgson and Liddell families, no one knew anything about Dodgson's feelings for Alice, whether he had even had any of significant depth or importance. But the uniqueness of her significance was assumed unquestioningly and always has been. Because the world obsessed about *Alice* the books, it made itself believe that Carroll must have obsessed about Alice the girl. In the absence of documentation there was myth, and it told the story of *Alice* and Alice that everyone was sure would turn out to be true. She was the muse; she was the object of desire.

Lennon took the first step in creating the final part of the modern Alice legend by suggesting that this romantic relationship had been, for Dodgson, the nearest thing to a sexual passion he ever knew, and that 'Carroll was actually in love with [her], and proposed honourable marriage to her'.²⁸

At the time Lennon had no evidence for her suggestion and put it forward only tentatively, as a possibility, a speculation to be played with. In support of it she could only quote a letter from Dodgson in which he described Alice as his 'ideal child-friend' and a rumour that Alice's mother 'hated' him. In addition, she had interviewed Alice's elder sister Ina back in 1930, apparently with a view to establishing the possibility of such a romantic interest. The record of her interview remains in two letters Ina wrote to Alice immediately afterwards. Only recently discovered, these letters contain about the only insight into the private Liddell view of the family relationship with Dodgson, about which descendants on both sides have been extremely cagey, and as such they are probably very important documents. They certainly indicate that there were well-kept secrets about

Dodgson and the Liddells, but they likewise suggest that these secrets were nothing to do with Alice.

They also indicate that Ina to some extent deceived Lennon or at any rate allowed her to believe that Dodgson had become overly fond of her sister in order to conceal the real reason – whatever that may have been – for her family's sudden break with him:

I said his manner became too affectionate to you as you grew older, and that Mother spoke to him about it, and that offended him ... *as one had to give some reason for all intercourse ceasing.*²⁹ [emphasis added]

Lennon, of course, could not know any of this at the time, and she naturally took Ina's hints and implications at face value, believing that Alice's sister was delicately admitting the truth rather than permitting a small white lie to be perpetrated. And so, when Lennon's book came out it contained the first, if indirect, assertion that the 'real Alice' was the key to the enigma of Lewis Carroll.

At about the same time that Lennon's book appeared in the UK, a Scottish writer and teacher of English, Alexander Taylor, was writing about what he saw as encoded mathematical and theological meanings in the *Alice* books. It was a scholarly but not a popular book. He tried with great dedication to find a publisher for it, but by 1950 he still had not succeeded. His surviving correspondence with Menella Dodgson makes the rest of the story clear. The consensus of opinion in the publishing fraternity was that the book needed to be rewritten, jettisoning some of the literary analysis and 'filling out the life-story', which Taylor had 'reduced to a mere outline'.³⁰

It was at this point that, according to Taylor, quite independently of Lennon (whose book had been published in the UK around three years earlier), he became convinced that Dodgson had been in love with Alice Liddell. This additional and rather daring new line did the trick for Taylor. He found a publisher, and his book *The White Knight* finally came out in 1952 with the new theory about Alice tacked rather uneasily on to the edges of the long and painstaking analyses of mathematics and nineteenth-century religious differences.

The revised portions of Taylor's book took Lennon's tentative suggestion and turned it into certainty. It was, apparently, Taylor's firm belief that

Dodgson had fallen in love with Alice when she was about seven years old and had watched her grow up and away from him without declaring his passion:

There is no doubt in my mind that Dodgson was in some sense in love with his heroine or that the breakdown in their relationship which occurred as Alice grew up was the real disappointment of his life.³¹

Taylor's greatest drawback was, like Lennon's, a complete lack of any evidence in support of this point of view. The Dodgsons, as usual, were not cooperating. The Liddells, in the person of Alice's son Caryl Hargreaves, would not sanction his idea. All he had was a void.

Like Lennon before him, only far more explicitly, he built his case on what he expected he would have found in Dodgson's diaries if he had been permitted to see them. Given this, the fact that his text reads as an almost painful striving to make a sum of zeros add up to something more than nothing is none too surprising. In desperation he begged the Dodgsons for crumbs from the diary but got nothing apart from the usual stonewalling. Left with only a handful of letters and the sum of Dodgson's creative output, Taylor was forced to do what he could – forced indeed to find a story of lifelong passion in attenuated assumptions about the 'young parabola' in one of Dodgson's mathematical pamphlets, 'The Dynamics of a Parti-cle', being based rather inexplicably on Alice Liddell; forced to find traces of Alice in the saintly Sylvie from *Sylvie and Bruno*, who was too obviously nothing like her; forced to find traces of the assumed love story in Dodgson's love poems, even though there were no extant love poems to small girls called Alice or anyone else. The only truly passionate love poems Carroll had ever published were about women: powerful, seductive, lithe and 'queenly' as well as, inevitably, lost.

Bravely Taylor strove to square this massively inconvenient fact with the idea of a man celebrating his love for a little girl of seven. He claimed that one of the cycle of love poems, 'Faces in the Fire', a fantasy about a man looking back on a lost love who is already a mature woman, and another, 'Only a Woman's Hair', which is about a woman's hair, were celebrations of Alice Liddell – because the heroines both had dark hair and Alice Liddell did, too.³² He did his best to gloss over the fact that the two brunettes in

‘Only a Woman’s Hair’ were unquestionably women (being, namely, a lady with a ‘queen-like face’ and a ‘wanton’ gypsy) and tried, with perhaps a little less strain, to explain the fact that the heroine of ‘Faces in the Fire’ develops from a childhood sweetheart into a grown woman with children of her own by suggesting that Dodgson was seeing his own future when his love for Alice would inevitably prove fruitless and she would belong to another.

He was looking forward in 1860 into his own life and in a moment of clarity or despondency saw it exactly as it happened, perhaps as he made it happen, perhaps as the Dean or Mrs Liddell or Alice herself made it happen.

As if to make sure his readers understood the question to be beyond doubt, he added:

It seems fantastically unlikely that a man in his late twenties should renounce all intention of marrying because of a child not yet out of the nursery. That, however, is the conclusion forced upon us by the facts.³³

But he was correct in one thing – it *did* seem very unlikely. Even the suggestion that Dodgson the poet was somehow anticipating a future in which his beloved would marry another and leave him for ever alone could not rescue him from the fact, painfully evident to modern eyes, that Dodgson’s love poetry could not be reshaped to tell the story Taylor was desperate to tell. It is not easily read as a celebration of paedophilic love for a child; it is a story of very obviously adult pain and passion. Whatever evidence there might be to suggest that Dodgson was in love with Alice Liddell, if indeed there is any, it cannot easily be found there.

But the myth already seemed to decree that these shortcomings would be elided in the popular mind, and Taylor’s *White Knight* became not just influential in Carroll scholarship but seminal. Since the late years of the nineteenth century, when the ‘Carroll’ legend was beginning to develop, so many people had assumed or wondered about Alice Liddell being the love of his life that it had already grown a kind of respectability through repetition. It seemed to be assumed by all commentators that any secrecy, pain or scandal in his life *must*, as a matter of course, be connected in some way with the ‘real Alice’, and no other possibility seems to have occurred to anyone. There were probably very few who seriously doubted that when

Dodgson's diaries were finally opened to the world they would be shown to contain the story of his all-consuming love for the 'real Alice', and the only division was between those like Langford Reed, who believed that this love would have been pure and platonic, and those like Taylor, who believed it was the closest to a sexual passion that the childlike 'Carroll' could attain.

In truth, both of these beliefs were – like the existence or absence of God – wholly matters of faith, because there remained virtually no data anywhere to support or refute them. But most people who read Taylor's book were primed by many years of such endemic assumption to agree that his guesswork was pretty well inevitably true. Not for the first time in this strange saga it seemed to pass unnoticed that he had almost no evidence, so deep was the assumption that the evidence *was* there.

So, despite this and his failure to establish anything that could be called a credible case, Taylor became, along with Collingwood, Bowman and Reed, one of the principal architects of the image of Lewis Carroll as it presently exists. His certitude that Alice Liddell ('she and she alone') was Lewis Carroll's 'lost love'³⁴ is still a central image of respected biography today, and Taylor has been described by no less an authority than Morton Cohen as 'one of Charles' more perceptive biographers'.³⁵

There is an added poignancy and strangeness here when we consider that it is possible Taylor himself never really believed what he was putting to paper. He had, after all, set out to write a book, not about Carroll's love life but about his usage of mathematics and contemporary religious issues in the texts of his books, and in this regard his book continues to be insightful and useful. His original plan had been to reduce the biography 'to a mere outline' and focus on those things that really interested him – the mathematics and the politics. He had discovered his belief that Carroll had loved Alice Liddell only after his publisher told him to flesh out the personal story if he wanted to get into print. As with Goldschmidt and the entire evolution of the Freudian interpretation of 'Carroll', we are left to consider the possibility that this major contribution to the belief system surrounding Carroll happened more by accident than design. Unlike Goldschmidt, Taylor almost certainly was not joking, but he may well have been and cobbling together a 'love story' in order to get his mathematical theories into print. One wonders if

Cohen was aware of this when he described Taylor in such glowing terms as a 'more perceptive' biographer.

With the publication of *The White Knight* and the 'official' dissemination of the idea that Alice Liddell was the single passion of his life the modern popular and scholastic image of Lewis Carroll was more or less complete. The only people who did not like it very much were those at the heart of the burgeoning Carroll establishment, people such as Roger Lancelyn Green and Derek Hudson. They voiced little objection to the leaps of imagination and the chronic lack of veridical data; the one thing they found unacceptable was the element of sex. For these men the idea of a Carroll 'in love' with anyone was anathema, and on the publication of Taylor's book they mustered for a 'response'.

The first salvo was to be couched in the most seemingly authoritative text ever to have appeared about Lewis Carroll. Almost exactly a year after *The White Knight* emerged into a welcoming and uncritical world the Dodgson family decided to allow some access to Lewis Carroll's private papers. They were about to publish an edited two-volume edition of his personal diary.

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By the end of the 1940s Carroll's biography had assumed a very firmly delineated structure that – in the way of myths – was becoming familiar even to those who had never read about either Carroll or his 'Alice'. The dark-coated don, shy and childlike, stumbling accidentally into immortality with his 'little fairytale' told for a beloved child, was part of the collective unconscious and had been for more than fifty years. But it was a curiously flattened life. Because the authors – Lennon, Reed, Taylor *et al.* – had been allowed virtually no private information even of the most inconsequential kind, even the most basic details about the places Dodgson visited, the friends he knew, the structure and content of his daily existence was denied them. In place of the fine sketching of the details of a daily life there was only the outline of the myth, which had become reduced to little more than a series of tableaux: Carroll in a boat with children; Carroll alone and pining for his little friend; Carroll, quaint and eccentric and reclusive, repudiating his famous name. So starved of anything real were these biographies that

they had become primarily about delineating absence, non-being, renunciation. To read them is to encounter the sense of a man – or rather a genderless ‘being’ – who hardly seems to exist; who surely could not have eaten and slept and eliminated and dealt in ordinary mortal terms with the business of living; a being who apparently left no mark on his physical landscape, touched no lives – except generic child-life. It is not surprising that when Virginia Woolf came to comment on the being encapsulated in these works she observed that ‘the Reverend C.L. Dodgson had no life’.³⁶

But what Woolf, and indeed many others, did not seem to consider was the possibility that this negation belonged not to Dodgson but to the process of his biography. Woolf’s analysis did not touch on this potential at all. She circumvented it to conclude not that it was regrettable that so little seemed to be known about Charles Dodgson but that everything was already known and that he ‘had no life’ – hardly even apparently to the extent of inhabiting identifiable physical spaces at identifiable physical moments. This is in itself a myth-engendered response; in Woolf’s readiness to accept this spurious and unreal absence as a kind of totality and truth we see the collective eagerness for a reason to remove ‘Carroll’ from the physical world. It is because this sense of unreality coincided so completely with the way in which people seemed unconsciously to want to view Carroll that there was so little serious challenge of the absent material, let alone the mythology that wafted mistily in its space.

It was precisely this subliminal desire somehow to disengage ‘Carroll’ from the physical world that shaped the publication of the first major source of private information on Charles Dodgson’s life – the edited two-volume version of his diaries published in 1953. Potentially, this publication could have been the first serious scholastic challenge to the plainly unscholarly myth; but, unfortunately, the results were not to be anything like so positive. The reasons for this are complex but can be broken down into a few essentials. The first and most overt problem was the agenda of the two members of the Dodgson family whose names might be ominously familiar – Carroll’s nieces, Violet and Menella.

These two ladies, the Aunt Abby and Aunt Martha of the Carroll saga, had been the guardians of the Carroll estate (along with their brother C.H.W. who seems to have been rather less assiduous than his sisters) since

the late 1920s and – possibly even more than Collingwood or other members of their family – they saw their job as one of protecting ‘Lewis Carroll’ from some sort of unnamed slur that they seemed to feel certain would descend if people were ever allowed to see their uncle’s unedited private papers and know the full story of his life. They were pixillatedly determined on secrecy to the (literal) death, having sworn that none of Carroll’s papers would leave their hands while they were alive. Consequently, they devoted their custodianship to a relentless effort to ensure that no one outside their family would ever have unfettered access to their uncle’s private writings. If we remember, it was Menella who so ambiguously claimed to have made sure one biographer, Langford Reed, left as ‘ignorant as he came’. At best this means she made sure to tell him nothing; at worst, as his text suggests, she may have deliberately misinformed him. Their determination to protect their uncle’s memory was self-evidently extreme, if quite hard to understand.

As early as 1932 Major C.H.W. Dodgson had himself embarked on the project of editing the diaries for publication – whether in response to public demand for information or to cash in on the Carroll-mania of the centenary year is not known. Surviving correspondence indicates that he had completed work on about four of the extant nine volumes (and, incidentally, that the other four were already missing by this time).³⁷ However, he apparently found himself unequal to the project, which was quietly forgotten. Twenty years further on, however, there were beginning, even in Carroll circles, to be a few quietly voiced suspicions expressed in some quarters that the Dodgsons were not being responsible and may even (God forbid!) be concealing things. This rumbling of doubt seems to have alarmed and disconcerted the guardians somewhat, and the publication of the diaries was seemingly in large part a deliberate attempt to allay these very low-key suspicions, to give the impression that the family were not really being secretive at all.

However, it seems they wanted to do this in a very carefully circumscribed – although not, of course, secretive – way. They wanted the diaries to be published but did not, apparently, want the originals to be seen by anyone outside the family. They therefore needed to engage an ‘editor’ who was prepared to accept some very unusual restrictions being placed on

him. He would be asked to work wholly from a typed-up version of the texts prepared by Menella and required to take her word for it that she had not left anything significant out. Their reasons for imposing these restrictions may not have been solely to do with concealing aspects of the contents. Unknown to the outside world the diaries were not only partially missing – four volumes having vanished some time after 1898 – at least seven pages had been cut or razored out, apparently by members of the family after Dodgson's death.

While the missing volumes could be – and indeed would be – explained as accidental loss, it might be hard to convince even the most trusting editor that seven pages had been 'accidentally' cut out. Menella's caginess may, therefore, have been as much to do with concealing what her family had been doing to Lewis Carroll's papers as anxiety about preserving her uncle's privacy – although, if so, her caution was probably unnecessary, for when the diaries finally were released in their entirety in 1969 the presence of these cut pages went almost without comment. Menella, had she only known it, could have saved herself a lot of trouble and simply relied on the curious self-censorship engendered in 'Carrollians' by the myth itself.

The second obstacle to the success of the diary project as a means of rebutting the myth was the chosen editor – Roger Lancelyn Green.

Green was well known in his day as an author of Arthurian tales and other reworking of myths – an unfortunately appropriate background perhaps. He had good literary connections. He had attended Merton College, Oxford, and befriended C.S. Lewis. He had even written a small biography of Carroll a few years earlier that had eschewed all the latest Freudian thinking about sexuality and deviancy and tried to bring 'Carroll' back into the Victorian image of ethereal sainthood and unworldliness. He deplored Taylor's book, not for its more obvious and eccentric pieces of imagining but because it sought to burden Carroll with a latent sexuality and the ability to fall in love; because it touched the beautiful legend of Carroll and Alice with a hint of carnal desire – which was the one thing this legend could not be allowed to have for men like Green, at least not overtly. For his own reasons (we can't guess what they may have been) he was powerfully wedded to rejecting this idea and to weeding out any suggestion

of this sexuality from Carroll's biography. To Violet and Menella he must have seemed like the perfect man for the job they wanted done.

From the outset Green showed little tendency to rock boats or ask awkward questions. Although Violet and Menella had put him in an impossibly compromised position through their decision only to let him work with a previously edited typescript, far from objecting publicly about this Green did his best to conceal the fact from public awareness for many years, even going so far as to claim in his preface to the publication that, 'I have been permitted to read every word of the Diaries.'³⁸

His readers and the general public naturally took this to mean that he had been allowed unfettered access to the original manuscripts, and this was what everyone believed for many years. It was only when he wrote a letter to the London *Times* in 1982 that the more compromised picture behind this carefully worded sentence came out. Offering a corrective of his earlier claim, Green wrote:

I did not work directly from the manuscripts, for obvious reasons of safety, but from typescripts which Menella had made by a local typist. She assured me that they were absolutely complete, with the exception of Vol. 8 (1862–64) which she typed herself, omitting certain passages which she considered too private for publication. She assured me that none of the omissions referred to Lewis Carroll, but to other members of the family ... I see no reason to doubt Menella's word.³⁹

This is quite a revealing as well as rather a strange letter for a number of reasons. To begin with, the 'obvious reasons of safety' seems rather bogus. There would surely have been no 'safety' risk in letting him at least read the manuscript volumes even if he had to then work with a typescript? Did he not wonder – and indeed ask – why they would not let him do this? His claim that he 'saw no reason' to doubt Menella's word is frankly ridiculous, for by 1982, when he wrote this letter, the manuscript diaries had been available to the public for thirteen years, and Green could have at any time looked at them and discovered (unfortunately) *exactly* how much reason he had to doubt Menella's word. He could have discovered that, far from letting him see 'every word', she had drastically pruned the text before giving it to him; he could have discovered that the 'private' entries from 1862 to 1864

that she had promised were nothing to do with Carroll were actually very much to do with him and his agonized struggle with a nameless guilt. He could have discovered, in fact, that she had lied to him and deceived the public who bought the book. So, if in 1982 he still 'saw no reason' to doubt Menella's word it could only be because he had chosen not to know. And this, sadly, is very much the problem with every aspect of his editorship.

Green's problem was perhaps that he was already too close before he began. By the time the Misses Dodgson approached him to do this job he was, by his own definition, already 'deep in Carrollian studies', which perforce meant deep in study of the mythology. He had written his own version of the 'biography', and for him the invitation to edit the diaries was an opportunity to get closer to a hero; not, unfortunately, Dodgson, about whom like most people he knew almost nothing, but 'Carroll'. It was his own vision of 'Carroll' he passionately cared about, 'Carroll' he expected to encounter and 'Carroll' he was apparently intent on ensuring everyone else encountered in the pages of the published *Diaries*. He was already primed, even without the control and manipulation of Menella and Violet, to self-edit his perception in line with this expectation; too happy to be fobbed off with any reassurance that could preserve the all important illusion; too happy to collude with the ladies in passing on their reassurances to the reading public, unquestioned and stamped with the seal of his supposed 'objective' confirmation. 'The fact that the Diaries have been inaccessible to the general critic,' he wrote in the preface to the published volumes:

has led to the suggestion that they contain information about Lewis Carroll which his pious relatives wish to keep from the world. That rumour can now be set at rest once and for all: *they contain nothing whatsoever about Lewis Carroll that the world at large could not read ...* [emphasis added].⁴⁰

The disingenuousness of this is breathtaking. This man who knows the Dodgsons will not even let him see the unexpurgated diary text assures his readership that it contains 'nothing whatsoever about Lewis Carroll that the world at large could not read'; he was willing to put his own scholastic honour on the line rather than simply acknowledge he did not have all the answers and that there might be anomalies and mysteries here.

Given all of this it is not surprising that the finished text of the *Diaries* was, to say the least, somewhat compromised. Only about 40 or 50 per cent of the original manuscript material actually appeared in print (it has traditionally been assessed as slightly more, about 60 per cent, but this is probably a mistake brought about by including Green's extensive footnotes in with the word count of the text). It seems most of the missing 50 or 60 per cent was removed without Green's knowledge while he remained almost wilfully unaware. Menella's unacknowledged excision of the text seems on the whole to have been quite unstructured, if not slightly incoherent. She left in an extraordinarily personal episode from 1880 in which Dodgson had to deal with his brother Skeffington's seemingly 'deranged' (Dodgson's word) conduct, while blue-pencilling even mild observations on the shortcomings of Alice Liddell. The 'agenda' (if we can use such a term) seems to have been quite intuitive, but even so the general tendency was to manage the text in line with the myth: to make sure any negative commentary of the real Alice was dropped and exclude the less child-centred aspects of Dodgson's life and art, thus presenting it as being closer to the expected image of 'Carroll'. Green's introductory preface, and indeed almost all of his footnotes and commentary, added a further layer to this, managing to, in a sense, 'misdirect' attention away from those remaining aspects of the text that didn't quite tell the expected story, and the two combined to form a subjective, even misleading, construction within the framework of an objective narratorial stance. At the same time no acknowledgement was made that Green was offering a reading, just as no acknowledgement was made that the text was highly edited; these two things were elided behind a deceptive impression of detachment and academic process where very little such process existed.

Even though Green's preface was notionally dealing with the content of the diaries, it made little attempt to frame itself with reference to this or any data. In fact, what it offered was a biographical commentary taken entirely from the myth, in which data was regarded as a subordinate and only utilized when it didn't offer any challenge to the mythology. The central tenet of that narrative was that essentially the diaries and Carroll's life, and even the actions of his family surrounding those diaries and that life, were largely about nothing, that they contained no secrets, no meaning, almost

no content at all, despite what any outward appearance might seem to suggest.

He adopted the same approach to the question of the four lost volumes of the diary. These had apparently been missing for some time – there is a letter from Stuart Collingwood to Menella dating from 1932 that makes it clear that some at least of the volumes had already vanished – but the fact had never been publicly acknowledged.⁴¹ Now that the diaries were being published, however, it was inevitable that this part of the story should become known, so Menella and Violet were almost forced to take Green into their confidence on this point. They therefore told him about the four lost volumes, although they apparently did not mention the seven cut pages, and gave him their explanation of how they came to be lost. He could have reported this in a detached academic way, left questions open and his own involvement minimal, but again he chose to present their story as if he was their Counsel for the Defence in the Court of Posterity. ‘The loss of these volumes appears to be due simply to neglect,’ he assured with authority:

Stuart Collingwood had the use of them for his Biography, and quotes from all of the thirteen volumes. After he had used them there was, apparently, no need to keep them carefully – and they disappeared, with what else remained of the papers, for a number of years. In the course of time, Dodgson’s possessions were scattered among members of the family, some of them were forgotten, and only during the last few decades, and particularly at the time of the Centenary celebrations in 1932, did the next generation begin to look for their uncle’s miscellaneous literary remains. The Diaries were found on a cellar floor, having fallen out of a cardboard box; and by then four of the thirteen volumes had disappeared – and no trace of them has since been discovered.

His desperation to make this threadbare story plausible could hardly be more obvious. He wants people to believe it, perhaps, so he can more readily believe himself. This agenda is nowhere more evident than when the editor tackled the issue of Dodgson’s agonized private prayers that litter the diaries for a few brief years in the 1860s. Unsurprisingly, none of these was recorded in the published text (indeed Menella had excluded most of them while preparing the typescript), but even so Green apparently felt the need to touch on the subject, possibly because Menella asked him to, not to

investigate it but to minimize and reshape it as something to fit 'Carroll'. He felt apparently compelled to acknowledge that:

Dodgson's Diaries abound with short passages of prayer, self-accusations, determinations to do better – and prayer once more as he confesses to past failure and acknowledges himself a sinner ...

but immediately added a layer of interpretation to neutralize this acknowledgement:

the sins confessed are entirely those of wasted time, wasted opportunities for doing good, anxiety lest he is failing to use his talents to the full, and self-condemnation of personal failings and self-indulgences – the worst of which seems to have been his tendency to sleep, or at least idle away some hours, after the early (and rather heavy) College dinner.⁴²

The prayers in question are an enduring mystery in Dodgson's biography. They occur in the diary for a few brief years in the 1860s. They are deep, bitter and anguished self-recriminations for undefined 'sin'. Green's claim that 'the sins confessed are entirely those of wasted time, wasted opportunities for doing good ... (and rather heavy) College dinners', etc., is at best an elision. In fact, the heavy college dinner is completely invented, either by Green or the ever reassuring Menella, with not even the slightest basis for it to be found in the text, and while it is slightly less deceptive to invoke a 'tendency to sleep' in the evenings (Dodgson's text does at least critique himself for doing this on one occasion), there is still very little to suggest this was in any way linked to his bitter sense of personal despair and sin. In a sense Green is correct, because sleeping too much is one of the only 'sins', although Dodgson does not call it that, ever specifically named, but this is because those things he actually calls 'sins' are never named directly in the text at all, only alluded to as 'evil' or 'corrupt' aspects of his life that he bitterly deploras. The fact that Green had not seen these texts for himself, or at least not the worst of them, undoubtedly made it easier for him to characterize them as he did. And wherever we look at his methodology we seem to discover this avoidance, either his own directly or channelled through his readership. Dodgson's much-neglected love poetry – written during his brief experience of nameless sin – was handled in just such a way.

While notionally ‘addressing’ this question, Green was operating a selective agenda. He chose to quote in full one of the slightest and least sexually loaded of these poems, ‘Faces in the Fire’, and then added the rather odd claim that it ‘represents the only proof – or rather the only suggestion – given by Dodgson of the “unhappy love affair” which most of his critics and biographers seem so certain must have taken place.’

This arbitrarily reduced Dodgson’s corpus of love poetry to one, when in reality there were at least five such poems all written by Dodgson within a few years of each other and at least one of which, ‘Stolen Waters’, was far more openly sexual – and therefore potentially far better ‘evidence’ of a potential love affair, one might think – than the example he chose. But these more powerful texts he merely referenced in passing as being *per se* inadmissible – ‘one might almost as well try to read autobiography into the pseudo-Keatsian “Stolen Waters” ... or the more pedestrian allegory ... “Three Sunsets”’⁴³ – thus neutralizing this potential expression of Dodgson’s romantic and sexual awareness without needing to confront it. It is difficult to see this as anything but deliberate avoidance.

An odd thing related to this is his claim that most of Dodgson’s critics and biographers had been ‘certain’ a love affair had ‘taken place’. In my quite extensive overview of the biographical material I have been unable to find any basis for this at all. I do not currently know of one biographer or critic who *ever* said Dodgson had been involved in a love affair. Quite the contrary, as this analysis has shown, they had almost all, like Reed, Lennon *et al.*, been convinced of the exact opposite, that Dodgson had never been mature enough to experience any kind of love – except for little girls. In truth, there had been only one biographer who had ever even hinted at an adult love affair and that had been – possibly significantly – the only one who had ever seen the entire evidence in the case, Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, but his suggestion had quickly been dropped from the life story as being inappropriate to the legend being created. Green was seemingly using the old rhetorical trick of the straw man – one slight little poem and an imaginary collection of biographers and critics who had built this into a love affair – so that he could knock it down. He was creating a device to enable him to address the image of love in Dodgson’s life as if it was something widely believed (which it was not) and essentially nebulous

and so present his analysis as debunking a silly story with good honest-to-goodness common sense. This was spin, pure and simple.

Perhaps most revealingly, Green dealt with Collingwood's claim that Dodgson's love poetry reflected a real experience of some kind by describing his remark as 'unfortunate'. Rationally, of course, Collingwood's remark is not 'unfortunate', it is simply a fact, something to be assimilated and analysed; it might even be thought potentially significant since Collingwood was Dodgson's nephew. But for Green it was 'unfortunate', it shouldn't have happened, presumably because it provoked a possibility that he didn't wish to accept and must therefore attempt to discredit.

It would be easy to condemn Green for the entirety of this seemingly irresponsible handling of the publication of Dodgson's *Diaries*, but this would be to ignore the real factors at work here. In a real sense Green was an honourable man doing his very best. His agenda was not one of personal gain – although it might to an extent have been personal aggrandizement. Within the confines of an agenda that recognizes a higher kind of truth beyond mere fact, as the Carroll mythology always implicitly had, he was serving a proper purpose: removing all the 'unfortunate' aspects of the history and the text that might give the wrong impression to the general public; allowing 'Carroll' to appear as he deserved to be remembered beyond the irritating inconsistencies of the data. Within this reading Green was not deceptive but merely offering a correcting hand to history, helping posterity to see things the way he knew they had really been, sharpened and focused and cleansed of too much blurry reality. In that sense Green is the devoted priest dropping fake tears on the statue in his chapel so that others can share the depth of his belief in miracles. His misrepresentation is expiated because it is in pursuit of the greater glory of 'Carroll'; Lewis, the patron saint of aspiration and all our golden yesterdays.

And, despite all the numerous and powerful shortcomings, the appearance of the edited diary volumes did contribute to the weight of general knowledge of Charles Dodgson's life. In the areas not touched by the mythic imagery Green's editorship was reasonably thorough, and in the sheer noting of times, dates and people the availability of this document contributed a reasonable amount of basic assistance to research. But, ultimately, it was the minutiae that he was uncomplicatedly honest about

and the minutiae that was permitted to filter out into the available data undisturbed. It ended up adding to the impression that minutiae was all there was. The very aspect that most needed to be addressed, Dodgson's social life, his emotional interactions with other human beings, his emotional and sexual nature, was the area most manipulated, elided, misdirected and suppressed, so that instead of offering any challenge to the mythology – as the unexpurgated text undoubtedly did – it seemed to confirm it. Green and the hysterically committed Dodgson sisters made sure that the published diaries that emerged in 1953 stood as the seeming proof that Carroll *really* had no life except children. The 'little girls', the 'child-friends', even some of the nude photographs Dodgson took of them, were, oddly (or perhaps not so oddly as we shall see further on), allowed to stand. Yet, by a kind of sophistic trick, even the potential significance of this image, as recognized by the Freudians, was evaded, which is perhaps why the Apologist tradition that sprang from Green's work is ultimately more dishonest than the 'psychoanalytical' vision it tried to destroy.

A key question is, what did Green, and indeed those other Apologists who followed his path of denial, think they were 'defending' their Carroll from? What was he apparently so afraid he might see if Menella had allowed him unfettered access to the diary manuscript, or indeed if he had stopped wearing the blinkers on his own perception? From what was he so desperate to avert his eyes? Was he afraid that Menella and Violet were hiding damning evidence of Carroll's lust for little girls? Did he think that by agreeing to be deceived he was saving his image of his idol from a savage, inadmissible truth? This might seem immediately plausible but becomes unlikely given that Green seems to have made more effort to deny Dodgson's adult sexual nature than any other part of him. One might think that a man anxious to prove his hero wasn't sexually focused on children might emphasize his broad interest in adult women rather than cut most of them out of the diary. Instead, by effectively dismissing the idea of an adult love affair as some *outré* notion with only one small poem to support it, and at the same time including so many references to 'child-friends', he was effectively branding Carroll as a quasi-paedophile, and he must have known it.

I suspect something altogether 'curiouser'. I suspect that Green had decided, at least on a subconscious level, that a soft-focus, gentle, quasi-paedophile 'Carroll' was easier for him to accept than a potentially real adult Charles Dodgson engaging with the real adult world. And this was why he paid more attention to discrediting the evidence for the adult Dodgson – which somehow deeply repelled him as it repelled so many adherents of 'Carroll' – than correcting the myth of the 'child-focused' Carroll. In this, I suspect, he would speak for many who loved and continue to love Lewis Carroll. There are many today who seem angrier and more unsettled by the suggestion of an adult sexuality and adult engagement with women than by the generally held idea that he 'loved little girls' rather too much. Better a perverted although virginal Carroll than a Carroll who might have too totally partaken of the real adult world: this would seem to be a deep, if inadmissible, reality for many 'Carrollians'. In this regard, it might be thought that there is more suppression, projection, referral and other Freudianisms to be found in the approach of Apologist biographers to Carroll than in the unfortunate Mr Dodgson's whole life.

To many of those who read the published text of the *Diaries* – and more importantly Green's highly manipulative preface – the suppressed-paedophile analysis seemed to have won by default. All that Green felt prepared to offer in denial of this was affirmation of the man's 'innocence', the patently absurd argument that he was too nice, godly and kindly to be a paedophile – as if they always proclaimed themselves with a bold sneer and were never apparently sweet, loving men adored by those they abuse.

This quite indefensible idea quickly gained standing among many Carrollians, perhaps because it offered the only chance of squaring the circle, of allowing Carroll to be a paedophile in all but name and yet still essentially *not* one. A recognizable group seemed to form quite quickly around this notion – a group that identified itself principally by its rebuttal of Freudian ideas and its wholesale embracing of the Victorian image of Carroll as ethereal latter-day saint, untroubled by anything as vulgar as sexual needs.

By the mid-1950s Carroll studies had become divided into factions: on the one hand, the not-quite respectable, more detached if sometimes slightly barmy 'Freudians' who viewed Carroll as a suppressed paedophile who had felt inappropriate sexual passion for his supposed muse Alice Liddell and, on

the other, the 'nouveau-Victorian' Apologists who denied all Freudian psychological insight as 'silly' (as indeed much of it was) and maintained that Carroll's adult-denying obsession with children was an expression not of sexual aberration but of a profound and almost holy innocence that lesser, grubbier mortals (such as the Freudians) could easily misconstrue. They tended to believe – with an almost religious intensity – that Dodgson had indeed loved Alice Liddell in a wholly special, mystic and consuming way; they simply refused to accept there had been anything sexual in it. It was the suggestion of physicality, in any form, that was ultimately unacceptable to the Apologists.

That both of these alternatives were based on nothing but the same wildly false myth and that neither of them was really sustainable in evidential terms was the one thing that never seemed to occur to anyone. If you wanted to study Carroll then you pretty well had to take up one or other of these positions.

In a way the Freudians were the less intellectually manipulative of the two. They might have been dealing with the same largely invented collection of 'facts', and they may even have quite freely invented their own, but they at least had the intellectual rigour to recognize the inevitable conclusion that their 'facts' were leading to; they did at least accept that the image as drawn by the myth did clearly imply a potentially dangerous and sexually fixated man. The Apologists did not try to be any more rigorous. They used the identical collection of invented facts and tended to be excessively convinced of Dodgson's total attachment to small female children; they merely tried to elide the obvious implications of this assumed passion by use of evasive and facile argument that ultimately did service to no one but would-be paedophiles of the modern age looking to justify their appetites and inclinations. They defended their Carroll from the imputations of paedophilia, not by resurrecting the forgotten complexities of his real interaction with the opposite sex but by claiming he was too sweet-natured, too godly to be a pervert and even asserted the fact that no child ever accused him as 'proof' of his innocence. Of course, the history of child abuse shows this to be sophistic nonsense. Numerous 'godly' and sweet men have been child abusers, and numerous victims end up worshipping rather than hating their abusers. If the 'facts' were truly as the myth says they were

then Dodgson would have to be condemned as a would-be paedophile and a self-confessed voyeur of girls' naked bodies; the defence of sweetness and innocence would be nonsense, and the Freudians at least acknowledged this.

It was the elision of the Apologists on this point that made them simultaneously more appealing and more insidious, for they held out the slightly corrupting idea that it might be possible for a man to engage passionately and quasi-sexually with a child without harm, that he could access her nakedness, her trust, her heart and mind and yet be innocent of dangerous intent or result. The danger and appeal of such an idea is obvious. It gave a rationale for people who aspired to such things and endorsed a covert culture of 'child-loving' masquerading as innocence. People looking for such endorsement were – and are – attracted to this image of Carroll. Some of his adherents very clearly want to impose a child-passion on him that exists primarily inside their own hearts, and it is this crusading fervour that gives some aspects of Apology a disturbing edge. Literary criticism and biography have become impregnated with dishonest images of 'innocent' child-passion mostly centred on Alice Liddell.

It was fast becoming a complementary aspect of this hysterical referral that Carroll's creativity should be explained with a complete exclusivity in terms of the one special child and that virtually every aspect of his famous fantasy stories *must* have been inspired by some sort of real-life experience he had enjoyed with her. The fact that there were almost no such 'real-life' experiences recorded in the available data had little impact on the progress of this belief, which would evolve to such a point that even the mirror the fictional Alice journeys through had to become not just a mirror but the mirror 'at Hetton Lawn, [Alice's] grandmother's house', no less,⁴⁴ even though there was not a solitary atom of evidence to suggest that Dodgson had borrowed his looking-glass from there or anywhere else.

Roger Lancelyn Green, contributed to developing this image as enthusiastically as he had to denigrating the idea of Dodgson as a man with any appreciable adult experience. The same Green who had dismissed Dodgson's love poetry as unmeaning found nothing unmeaning at all in looking for 'real' chessboards in the landscape of southern England that Dodgson and Alice might have found together. An article he wrote for the *Sunday Times Magazine* on 7 April 1963, entitled 'My Name Is Alice',

managed to combine a beguilingly total estrangement from some basic facts (the name of Alice's father, Dodgson's age and the age of one of Alice's sisters are all wrong) with a free invention all his own. He announced that the whole concept of *Through the Looking-Glass* had been developed during a trip Dodgson made to Alice Liddell's grandparents' home in 1863:

the day was Saturday April 4 1863, and the place ... was Charlton Kings on the edge of Cheltenham ... In the afternoon the whole party went to Birdlip in the carriage, but there Dodgson got out and walked back accompanied by Lorina, Alice and Miss Prickett, over Leckhampton Hill ... From this walk grew the story of the Red Queen shouting 'faster faster' on the way down from the hill ...

And:

It was Alice Pleasance Liddell who led him into Wonderland and *Through the Looking Glass* a hundred years ago ...

And:

Dodgson once said that talking with Alice was 'next to what conversing with an angel might be'.⁴⁵

Of all this, the 'walk' over Leckhampton Hill actually did happen as Green says it did, but that is about as far as it goes. There is nothing to suggest the Red Queen 'grew' from this walk. In fact, there is no extant evidence to show when or why or how Dodgson made up the Red Queen, or anything else in *Looking-Glass*; nothing to suggest that any of it had anything to do with the Liddells at Cheltenham or anywhere else; and nothing to suggest Alice Pleasance Liddell 'led him through the Looking-Glass' either then or at any other time or place.

As for the bizarre claim that Dodgson had likened talking to Alice Liddell to 'conversing with an angel', this was Green simply making things up. That Dodgson had said something about 'conversing with an angel' was broadly true, but that he had said it about Alice Liddell was not. His actual words, in context, were:

Permit me to offer you my sincere thanks for the very sweet verses you have written about my dream-child (named after a real Alice but nonetheless a dream-child) and her Wonderland. That children love the book is a very

precious thought to me, and next to their love I value the sympathy of those who come with a child's heart to what I have tried to write about a child's thoughts. Next to what conversing with an angel might be – for it is hard to imagine it – comes, I think, the privilege of having a real child's thoughts uttered to one. I have known some few real children (you have too I am sure), and their friendship is a blessing and a help in life.⁴⁶

Nothing to even imply Alice Liddell was such a 'real child' or that he ever thought for a moment that talking to her was like 'conversing with an angel'. In pretending differently Green was simply dropping tears on the statue again. The sublimated romantic drive underpinning this doesn't need to be pointed out. The real love affair seems to be between 'Alice Pleasance Liddell' and the writers themselves.

The 'biography' of Carroll that had already passed through so many phases was entering another one. The well-meaning deception of Collingwood, intent on hiding aspects of his uncle's life for very understandable reasons, had morphed first into the 'memoirs' of girls pretending to have been children when they weren't and then into the odd, driven desire of writers like Reed to deny Carroll's adult sexuality in total, *not* any longer to save his reputation but just because they seemed to want it that way, then through the Freudians who had turned his 'infantilism' into paedophilia. Now it had reached a new height of intensity, with 'Carroll' being passed into the hands of writers who, even though they now could obtain the evidence to challenge his image of perversion, were undeclaredly more prepared to accept a belief in his 'deviancy' than even the slightest suggestion of a possible adult sexual life. It was largely thanks to Green's status as the expert editor of the diaries that, in Britain and North America at least, this romantic Apology began to be seen as the respectable approach to Carroll and became the standard of all British and American Carroll 'scholarship' for many many years. It was a scholarship dominated by the thing Carrollianism had always been dominated by – the strange, compelling myth – only now it had experts and a document, the sweetened, condensed, emasculated published *Diaries*, to give it an air of authenticity. In contrast, Apology's darker, yet more honest, twin, Freudianism, became seen as the rather more louche, disreputable 'European' approach, favoured by people who were not quite 'nice'.

The next full biography to be written after the publication of the diaries would continue this Apologist tradition with less hysteria and more honesty than Green but only a little less disturbingly.

✱

Derek Hudson was born in 1911, the son of a solicitor. Like Green, he attended Merton College, Oxford, and indeed he and Green became friends and allies in the Carrollian establishment. Hudson wrote on quite a wide variety of topics, including biography, but a central subject for him was Carroll, whom he returned to again and again. Perhaps he was attracted to the study of those who seemed to transcend normal human physicality, for a second biographical subject of his was A.J. Munby, another reputedly virginal Victorian, although Munby, unlike Dodgson, made the claim of celibacy for himself instead of having it foisted on him by posterity.

Hudson was, by all accounts, a kind soul, who even got on well with the prickly Menella (she gave him her recipe for orange marmalade, which he pronounced very good). He seems to have wanted to think well of everyone and was essentially honest and sincere in all his dealings. He was not driven to rewrite history like the far more deceptive Green; he did not seem to want to campaign aggressively for his own idea of 'Carroll'. But, nevertheless, in his more benign way he was just as much a true believer. His book was conceived as a second attempt (the published *Diaries* had been the first) to counter Alexander Taylor's influential book *The White Knight*, which had asserted blatantly that Dodgson had been in love with the small child Alice Liddell. Such directness was completely unacceptable to the Apologists; they preferred to imply this but avoid saying it in so many words. In his preface Hudson made a delicate admission of his agenda of countering Taylor and his claims:

The fantasy of Lewis Carroll has in its turn inspired some far-fetched fantasy from his biographers. It may be the time to re-establish some facts ...⁴⁷

By 'facts' of course, Hudson did not really mean veridical data. He meant the 'facts' as understood by the Apologists, as promoted by Green in the *Diaries*. He meant those things he wanted to believe were fact; the cosier

aspects of the traditional biography which his book composted even more by including a few more personal reminiscences from the worshipful company of 'child-friends' and a little of the much-edited newly published *Diaries*. The blend was rescued from total predictability by Hudson's own intuitive observations which were sometimes unexpectedly incisive – as when he considered the relationship between Dodgson senior and his son. But his ability to exercise this incisiveness was limited by his agenda. Like Green, he was entirely hostage to the one overwhelming principle of apology – that under no circumstances, whatever the consequences of denial, can it be admitted that Carroll might have had any form of private life suggestive of real experience or adult pain, even with the beloved Alice. It was against the mere suggestion by Taylor of such pain that he had gone crusading into print, and the whole paradigm of his commitment was to deny absolutely this possibility. So, whenever he encountered anything in Carroll's life that seemed to suggest the presence of such adult experience or pain, he, like Green, saw it as his duty to deny it or explain it away as quickly as possible, even if by doing so he was making a nonsense of his own insights.

So, as with Green, but rather less manipulatively, he introduced the more troubling or little understood aspects of Dodgson only to try to dismiss them as largely irrelevant. For example, Dodgson's relationship with women, still entirely unpublicized and almost unknown in 1954, was noticed, commented on:

He had a deep instinctive admiration for women, yearning for their sympathy and often finding it.

but then immediately glossed over rather than investigated:

But it is probable that he could not reconcile in himself love and desire, and likely that he avoided problems of adult love and intimacy in his own life.

The 'deep instinctive' admiration for women was evident in the diaries, but the ensuing assumption that Dodgson 'could not reconcile love and desire' seems to originate in nothing more substantial than his failure to marry, although it would be a simplistic analysis indeed that used this as a reason *per se* for assuming a complete lack of 'intimacy' in his life. Like Green, elision rather than analysis was the preferred method by which

Hudson dealt with these questions. Yet when he turned to Dodgson's love poetry he was unable to persuade himself to dismiss this work out of hand as Green had done. The poems 'may be poetic exercises of imaginary application', he wrote, yet he noted: 'the pervading mood is too insistent to allow them to be explained away on that account'.

At the time this was perhaps the most paradigm-shifting commentary so far on Lewis Carroll's emotional life. He had made the leap of incorporating an idea that no biographer since Collingwood had done: that Dodgson's love poems presented something of a problem for anyone who wanted to dismiss them as 'poetic exercises'. This was, of course, to open the possibility that the poems had been inspired by some form of emotional experience in Dodgson's life; but such experiences – particularly of 'love' in any adult sexual sense – had been entirely inadmissible to the myth. So Hudson's observation introduced a problem: if the mood of the poetry was 'too insistent' for it to be 'explained away' as poetic imagination, what did this mean for the cherished asexual image of Carroll? Hudson found a means of reconciling this seeming inconsistency by deciding that Dodgson's love poetry showed only that 'he pined for the love that was denied him'.⁴⁸

He did not give any specific reason why he inferred that love was inevitably denied Carroll and did not engage with the fact that in the narrative of most of the poems love is not denied the experiencer – who finds it and enjoys it but then either loses or abandons it. It was expressed merely as an axiom of his idea of Carroll's life that love was simply not a factor; in such circumstances how else could the poetry be explained other than by a pining after what was 'denied'? So, indeed, Hudson commented in conclusion that:

If our reading of Dodgson's character has been correct, his love for Ellen Terry, assuming it existed, was no more likely to have found physical expression than his love for any other woman.⁴⁹

The 'reading' was founded primarily in an absence of evidence. There was indeed little evidence that Dodgson had had a romantic attachment to the actress Ellen Terry, who was a lifelong platonic friend, but there was no evidence that he was incapable of 'physical expression' or intrinsically unlikely to attempt it. Such crucial 'facts', the linchpins of the mythic

narrative, were once again selected by intuition not by verifiable data when an entirely opposite conclusion was equally likely. Dodgson's implied impotence here and in other biographical readings is employed as a device to avoid the necessity of looking further into evidence and its possible implications.

In line with his avowed motive in writing the book, Hudson professed to be most 'sceptical' about the idea propounded two years earlier by the honorary Freudian Alexander Taylor that Dodgson had been sexually in love with Alice Liddell. Yet curiously, even here, he did not investigate the evidence or evoke any of the obvious arguments about Taylor's lack of data. Instead of dissecting the latter's claim and negating it Hudson contented himself merely with pointing out that the love poems were unlikely to refer to the little girl as they 'were written while Alice Liddell was between seven and ten years old' (which was true enough, although not much of a defence against a potential paedophilic passion). Again, it seems that Hudson's approach forbade him from turning to the evidence even when it might have helped him refute something he wanted to refute. After all, the data might have disproved the theory of Dodgson's obsession with Alice, but it might have robbed him of the image of Carroll he was striving to preserve and which could only be preserved by avoidance of certain aspects of the veridical facts. So he could not effectively engage with Taylor's assertions. In fact, there is a sense in which he perhaps did not want to.

Although he affirmed a notional opposition to Taylor's ideas, it was a pretty feeble opposition. Just as the difference between Freudian and Apologist was the difference between overt statement and oblique implication, Hudson's only real difference with Taylor was that the latter dared to say what Hudson preferred to fudge and imply. As his book makes quite clear, like most Apologists Hudson accepted the idea of Alice Liddell's unique status in Dodgson's heart; it was the possibility of sex that made him squeamish. He therefore had little interest in discovering the lack of evidence for any such passion; he preferred to suggest that the passion was blurry enough to avoid uncomfortable implications or stirrings of anything nasty in the rose garden. Tellingly, his greatest argument against Taylor was that it seemed to him to be improbable that Dodgson would be in love 'in the adult sense' with anyone – man, woman or child.⁵⁰ As usual, this most

crucial 'evidence' for Carroll, the lynchpin of his argument, is presented purely in terms of intuition, while any reference to the data is tangential at best.

Ultimately Hudson's book repeated the formula begun by Green in dealing with the new source of data in the newly published *Diaries*. As with Green's preface, Hudson's book devolved principally on a wilful avoidance of all the evidence that would have forced a reconsideration of Dodgson's assumed obsession with prepubescent children. He avoided almost any reference to Dodgson's woman-friends, even though there were sufficient clues now available to make it possible to investigate this aspect of the author's life. Hudson avoided any real analysis of the true ages of the numerous 'child-friends' he referred to freely in his book. He avoided all consideration of the missing diary material and the obvious questions this raised. He approached Dodgson's love poetry in terms of a preconceived perception that it was about the kinds of things that 'Carroll' would write about (warnings of the perils of temptation and so on). He used tortured reasoning to accept Collingwood's claim, from 1932, that his suggestion of a 'shadow' on his uncle's life had no real substance – even though, as he himself observed, Collingwood was being blatantly deceptive when he wrote it.⁵¹

Hudson did mention that the published versions of the poems were decorated with 'little naked girls', although actually they were intended by the illustrator, Gertrude Thomson, to be fairies, and some of them were boys. He seemingly was not aware that the fairies had been rather forced on Dodgson when Miss Thomson would not produce the landscapes that he had wanted for the volume and went on to observe that these little naked girls offered a 'running commentary' on the poems, although he did not vouchsafe what that commentary was.⁵²

Similarly, Hudson repeated the common belief that the majority of Carroll's friendships ended abruptly when the girls grew past fourteen and wrote that various 'young guests', such as May Miller and Gertrude Chataway, stayed with Dodgson 'unchaperoned' at Eastbourne, without adding (he may not have been aware) that these particular 'young guests' were in their twenties at the time. Miller was twenty-five and Chataway was twenty-seven. Hudson even quoted a letter that Dodgson wrote to one of his

woman-friends in which he specifically commented on the numerous women who had been staying with him and used it to sustain a completely contradictory meaning, maintaining that what this letter really showed was the ‘complete innocence’ and childishness Dodgson was displaying. And, as if Charles Dodgson had not already been patronized enough over the years, Hudson even went so far as to liken his letter to *The Young Visitors*, the wildly misspelled novel written at the end of the nineteenth century by a nine-year-old girl!⁵³ So Dodgson’s text on adult love and his various recorded friendships with adult women became subverted into a further confirmation of his child-centredness.

Having thus – like Green before him – wiped out the evidence for a potentially more complex and mature Dodgson, Hudson was left with nothing but the children and the by now familiar odd and empty life. Even more blatantly than Green, it seems that for Hudson accepting Carroll the quiet pervert was more desirable than accepting a man who had any appreciable adult perspective to his life. In fact, his opening chapter quite clearly frames the idea that Carroll was indeed a would-be paedophile and merely begs that people have the ‘respect’ not to be prurient and talk about it:

Accepting the repressions that can now be recognised, accepting the help of scientific analysis there is still room for sympathy and understanding. If there was weakness in C.L. Dodgson, there was also great strength, the strength of Christian belief. He deserves to be approached, not with prurient curiosity, but with gratitude for his genius ... with respect too for the way in which he fought against his difficulties and managed to live what was on the whole a happy and certainly a useful life.⁵⁴

‘If they [the child-friends] were less than sweethearts to him, they were certainly more than daughters,’ he writes later, revealing not only a questionable line in assumptions but a quite extraordinary set of priorities for a man who had daughters of his own.⁵⁵

He did not stipulate how we were supposed to offer understanding and sympathy for a man whom he had obliquely characterized as a sexual deviant; the implication is that we should refrain from dwelling on this. Having stripped away the evidence for Dodgson being interested in women

and leaving readers with this filtered brew of 'little girls,' Hudson now compounded the insult by asking his readership to indulge in a final act of avoidance: to simply be grateful for the man's 'genius' and avoid 'prurient curiosity'. Hudson was apparently happy to perpetuate a fairly simplistic image of Carroll and his 'little girls,' happy to nod and wink and tap his nose at how 'odd' it all was. He only blanched at calling this creation what it obviously was: paedophilic. Could he, Green or any of the Apologists (in which were included most of Dodgson's family) be surprised if this failed to convince all those outside their immediate circle?

3

The Myth and the Millennium

Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds

– Title of a book owned by C.L. Dodgson

DEREK Hudson's biography received the enthusiastic support of the Dodgson family and the burgeoning Carroll establishment. But beyond this rather narrow world the shortcomings of the approach adopted by Green, Hudson and the Dodgson family continued to be painfully obvious. It was clear to many that beyond offering polite denials and pleas for understanding, the Dodgsons and the Carroll 'experts' seemed to have no solid evidence to offer in rebuttal of the seemingly strong case that had been made for Carroll as a paedophile. And so, quite naturally, the more searching and sceptical commentators tended to believe that Lewis Carroll had indeed been a paedophile and that his family and his Apologist admirers were simply too squeamish to admit it. They assumed that anything the family were continuing to hide had to be the damning evidence of his twisted sexuality. They assumed that if the unedited diaries contained anything new it would be the proof that he was in love with young Alice Liddell. From the mid-1960s this became quite an accepted view among the trendy intelligentsia: Jonathan Miller hinted at it in his televised Freudian dream of *Alice in Wonderland*, but the most outspoken proponent was the playwright Dennis Potter.

In 1965 Potter wrote a wholly imaginary but powerful play about Dodgson and the Liddells entitled *Alice*. Potter was no 'Carrollian' wedded to one of the two conflicting belief systems. He came to the question with an open mind and simply commented on what he saw. He was too smart and insightful to be able to accept the ethereal cosiness of the Apologist version of Carroll and sharp enough to see that their image was untenable in any real world context. He was able to see that what Hudson and Green had

described without giving it a name was a paedophile, and so understandably he put his twos together and made what looked like four – here was a man with no discernible adult life who ‘loved’ little girls, enjoyed taking photographs of them naked, having them to stay in his home and who, crucially, lost interest in them when they became physically mature; a man whose family seemed squeamish about allowing people too close to the documents in the case. Obviously the big secret was Dodgson’s sexual perversion and, more precisely, his passion for little Alice Liddell. What else could these apparently sane people be hiding? He had to conclude that Taylor and the Freudians must be right.

It was a reasonable and honest – indeed an almost inevitable – deduction. Neither Potter nor anyone else could be expected to guess at the bizarre truth: that the evidence for an adult Dodgson with adult interests existed but was being suppressed by people with a strange personal agenda; that Carroll’s reputation was being sacrificed to a paradigm that preferred the rumours of paedophilia to the necessity of admitting that this man may have had normal, private human relationships with people who were not juvenile.

Alice was broadcast in October 1965, the centenary year of the publication of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. George Baker as Dodgson, in an alarmingly unconvincing wig, hovered and stammered and pined quiveringly for the lovely Alice. In his black-clad, stuttering, socially paralysed, little-girl-crazed psychological meltdown this version of Carroll was actually quite a faithful rendition of almost everything that had been written about the man for the past sixty-seven years. In fact, Potter had been conservative, for he missed out the compulsive hat-wearing and didn’t make his Carroll hide behind the furniture whenever an adult woman got closer than mailing distance. So, if it looked a little silly, it was only because ‘silly’ is what Carroll had become. But it was also a compelling picture of a sad and lonely repressed paedophile and, as such, a direct challenge to the Dodgsons and the Apologists to refute it if they could.

Did they refute it? Did they take this opportunity to try to rescue poor Charles Dodgson from the prison of misapprehension and half-truth that circumstance had contrived to lock him in? No, they did not.

The response of the Carroll establishment to Potter's challenge was entirely in line with their response to every such challenge that had ever been made, from the original Freudians, through Lennon and Taylor: they averted their eyes and hoped it would go away. It was only when Potter's drama was shown for a second time some nine months later that the guardian of the Carroll estate, Carroll's great-nephew Philip Dodgson Jaques, felt obliged to offer some form of objection, in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, published on 12 July 1966. The tone and content are instructive for those who have followed the story this far:

Sir, I am sorry that Dennis Potter's dramatisation of *Alice* is being repeated by the BBC since it is quite misleading. My great uncle Lewis Carroll scarcely stammered when talking to children. But more important is the misrepresentation that Alice's mother accompanied the party on the river trip to Godstow. She was not in the party and I suspect that the error was deliberately introduced to stress the play's theme that Lewis Carroll's friendship with Alice had some sinister aspect.

Why are we not allowed to see Lewis Carroll as the eccentric but deeply religious and honourable man that he was? Can it not be understood that someone so sensitive to the beauty of innocence in children could enjoy their company by telling them stories and with no other intentions than to make them happy?

A play like this may be good entertainment, but its facts should never be accepted as historical truth without proper evidence.¹

The letter only confirms the seemingly inexplicable evasion of the Dodgson family and its adherents. No attempt is made to address the major questions regarding the man's biography or to offer any corrective at all. The mythic image is, as usual, accepted entirely without question, and Jaques frames his objection purely in terms of interpretation. He offers an unsupportable claim that Carroll's stammer almost completely disappeared in the presence of children (quite demonstrably, from the testimony of several 'child-friends', it did not) and a general plea for everyone to accept that Dodgson was the Apologist 'Carroll', eccentric, harmless and off limits for any serious analysis. When we consider how easy it would have been for Jaques to show how simplistic Potter's imagery was, it says much that this quite feeble appeal was actually considered adequate. Was Jaques, who had

not been born until many years after Dodgson died, so unfamiliar with the evidence that he did not know much about his great-uncle's life? Or was he still hostage to the old agenda, whatever exactly that may have been? The question of what this family thought they were doing and what they were trying to conceal seems to get more difficult to answer.

Potter was indelicate enough to respond to this letter:

Sir, Mr Philip Dodgson Jaques protests to you about the 'misleading' nature of my television play *Alice*. He offers instead a grossly simplified picture of his great uncle Lewis Carroll, apparently content to follow the lead of the family biographer Stuart Dodgson Collingwood in suppressing the secret of the admitted 'disappointment' which shadowed the life of this great writer.

My play showed Lewis Carroll as a man of great piety and courage resolutely overcoming the 'unholy thoughts which torture with their very presence the fancy that would fain be pure'. I believe that his beautiful stories and reactionary politics both spring from the same source and cannot see why it is a disservice to explore the complexities of character which so often accompany unusual talent in a writer.

Surely this is better than reducing Lewis Carroll to the level of a fairy-tale simpleton eternally imprisoned by nursery walls?²

It would have been interesting to read Jaques's – or Green's or Hudson's – reply to this, but as far as I can determine this transparently intelligent and honest challenge simply went unanswered. The Dodgsons had apparently said their piece and settled back into silence. The answer to Potter's question was apparently no; 'fairy-tale simpleton' was better; 'nursery walls' were better; silence was better than an attempt to 'explore the complexities' of any aspect of Lewis Carroll. Here indeed is the quintessence of what it meant to be an Apologist.

So it was in this strange, schizoid, fractured, dishonest state that Carroll studies moved towards the end of the twentieth century. To the world at large, particularly after Potter's play, the case was understandably closed. Carroll had been tried and found guilty of a kind of tragic, suppressed paedophilia, and the squeamish silence of his family and the Carroll experts such as Green served only to damn him further. Meanwhile inside the Carroll establishment a curious embattled mentality began to take shape – a stubborn conviction that people who really admired 'Carroll' were above

even considering the question of his sexuality; an equally stubborn refusal to engage with the serious questions that had been asked by outsiders such as Potter and never answered except by silence.

Four years after the broadcast of *Alice* the entire manuscript diaries were quietly sold to the British Library. A published edition of some of Dodgson's letters followed in 1979. But the next twenty years were to show all too clearly that an octogenarian mythology is not intimidated by a few bits of paper.

The new, untainted evidence slipped into the mirror-faced pool of tears that was Carroll studies, with hardly a ripple breaking the surface, hardly a stir or a murmur from anyone who was supposed to care. It sank softly into the depths while, above, things went on much as before. Hudson, with the support of Green and most of those who were beginning to be called 'Carrollians', continued to conduct a well-mannered feud with Taylor over which of their images was 'the truth'. Other biographers wrote new works that said all the old things over again in a different font or in a slightly different order or occasionally with a slightly different insight or emphasis. But essentially nothing changed. And the years ticked on, and the new evidence that could have changed the nature of what people knew about Carroll settled into the silt and rested there.

*

The insanely controlling Menella died in 1963, and her sister Violet, co-guardian of the Carroll estate, followed her in 1966. What remained of Dodgson's personal papers – a fragment of what there had been in 1898 – passed into the hands of a younger generation of the Dodgson family, and three years later, in 1969, Charles Dodgson's remaining diaries were sold to the British Library where they could be accessed by any researcher with a library card.

Revealed to the world at last, these nine neat grey notebooks presented curiosities and questions that no one could have expected. They showed a man who, far from being childlike and reclusive, was at home in the drawing-rooms of London society. They showed a man who displayed absolutely no discernible inclination to drop his female friends when they reached adolescence, who, on the contrary, enjoyed many close friendships

with teenage girls and adult women, some of whom had husbands; a man whose 'child-friends' were often not children at all. They showed a man who admired mature and curvaceous actresses and 'scandalous' paintings, who spent weekends away in London with married ladies and holidays by the sea with unchaperoned girls in their teens and twenties. They showed his life haunted for a few short years by an unexplained guilt, confided in periodic and agonized prayers.

Also significant was what they did *not* show. For decades it had been assumed that when Carroll's diaries were made public they would be found to contain confessions of passion for the 'real Alice' – Alice Liddell. It was this assumption that underpinned everything the Freudians had written and every serious consideration of Dodgson's sexuality, from Taylor's *White Knight* to Dennis Potter's *Alice*. But now Dodgson's diaries were accessible to all it could be seen that this simply was not the case. The nine surviving volumes contained no declarations of love for the real Alice; indeed they contained hardly any individual mentions of her at all.

The diaries also presented mysteries and questions of another kind. People had known about the four lost volumes since the publication of Green's edited *Diaries* in 1953, but what no one was prepared for was the existence of numerous missing pages showing signs of having been deliberately cut out, probably by at least two different hands.

The sum of what is there and what is *not* there, together with the eloquent silence of what has been removed, made this one of the richest seams of literary history to have been opened in the last century. At the very least it would be reasonable to assume that the diaries' emergence into the public domain would begin to alter the picture of Lewis Carroll as the evidence became available to all. But this was not to be the case. In fact, the release of Dodgson's unexpurgated diary in 1969 created very little discernible impact.

In a little ceremony, the nine remaining volumes were received from the family by a representative of the British Library. They were individually wrapped in thick, soft, creamy paper, bound with red tape and stored carefully away. And there they stayed, more or less undisturbed and more or less unremarked, while for several years biographers continued to write about Carroll as if the diaries did not exist. Nearly thirty years and two

major biographies would go by before any significant notice was taken of the anomalous material they contained.

‘Little girls ... were the only sexual object he allowed himself,’ wrote the distinguished French scholar Jean Gattegno in 1976, seven years after the release of the diary that confirmed the existence of the numerous adult women-friends who had enriched Dodgson’s life.³ Gattegno was a Freudian and prepared to call a spade a spade and a paedophile a paedophile. He had little sympathy for the essentially absurd Apologist idea that Carroll was too nice to be a sexual pervert, even if he seemed to behave like one, and his texts generally take a very robust and no-nonsense approach to the subject of Dodgson’s sexuality as defined by the myth. But his determination to be ruthless did not apparently extend to acquainting himself with the newly available raw data. As much as any Apologist he was hostage to the confines of the mythology and discovered his ‘facts’ and his rationale exclusively from within it. That Gattegno, writing about Carroll, saw no need to read Charles Dodgson’s diary is only bizarre from the perspective of external commentary. From within the mythic construct it was perfectly reasonable and perfectly the norm.

Similarly, in 1976, the great Apologist Derek Hudson reissued his 1955 biography. It was seven years since the diaries had been made available, and it might have been expected that Hudson would want to use them to revise and update his material. But there was no such expectation, and Hudson did not rewrite his text in any way to take account of the diary material and what it revealed of Dodgson’s previously inaccessible life. In fact, although he wrote a new five-page preface, he did not even mention the unpublished diaries.

The tendency to ignore them in favour of retelling and adding to the already established ‘truth’ continued as the second half of the century drew to a close. Carroll societies flourished in Britain and America, and their journals were replete with articles about a variety of subjects: bibliographic questions or answers, restatements or developments by the acknowledged experts, such as Green and Hudson, of the mythic fact base; polite squabbles between these experts and the more maverick Taylor; observations on the various eccentricities or minor pathologies of Carroll and/or his ‘little girls’; and potential new biographical references (mostly assumed to involve Alice

Liddell) in his famous books. The articles were sometimes amusing, sometimes revealing of intriguing facts or helpful in answering some questions, but there was almost nothing published that reflected any research being done on the most intrinsic evidence of Carroll/Dodgson's existence, no indication that there were even questions in need of answers, no hint that there was anything unknown or unknowable about Carroll. The discourse continued to define itself almost solely in relation to the myth and the certitudes predicated on the myth. One notable exception was the eccentric but insightful researcher Raphael Shaberman, whose determination to peer beyond the legend led him to look more closely than anyone else had at the puzzling text of the diaries and the even more puzzling excisions, but little attention was paid to his work.

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Anne Clark is a founder member of the Lewis Carroll Society that was established in 1969, the same year that the manuscript diaries were sold to the British Library. At the time she was working in the Housing Office of the Greater London Council and was introduced to Carroll by a colleague who was also the first president of the new society, Ellis Hillman.

The development of her biography has to be seen within the context of the birth of the society, which in its early days was dominated by the most deeply Apologist and unrealistic tradition. From the British perspective Freudianism, or any attempt to suggest that Dodgson may have had an active sexual nature, was tantamount to a betrayal of Carroll and all his most sacred meaning. No one who wanted to be accepted within the fraternity and its new society would consider expressing any such views. By this time the Apologist image of Carroll was the dominant one. It was confirmed by the 'scholarship' of such eminent men as Roger Lancelyn Green and Derek Hudson and seemed intellectually above reproach. It was from within this tradition and from within the Lewis Carroll Society that Clark produced her biography.

It was the first wholly new biography to have been written since the diaries were released, but Clark ventured only a little further into what could be called serious investigation of the newly available evidence. However, given the power of the prevailing tradition, the fact that she ventured at all is

worthy of note. She evidently did consult the manuscript diaries, even if her review was not searching – she does not, for example, appear to have made any attempt to assess the amount of missing material, nor even to be aware that more than one page had been cut (the total is seven pages of text along with several blank pages).

However, judged in the curious restrictive terms of Carrollian studies, she was almost groundbreaking and deserves credit for that. Unlike her predecessors in the second half of the century, Green and Hudson, she did take the trouble to visit the British Library and undertake hands-on research. Having noticed the one missing page, she devoted some space to considering it, even if her conclusions were not revelatory (she decided it was ‘no doubt highly significant’ and left it there).⁴ Although she paid virtually no attention to Dodgson’s intellectual and philosophical development and couched his experience of religion in the accepted tones of reverence, she did venture into a reconsideration of other aspects of the most myth-drenched landscape. To a greater extent than any previous writer she acknowledged some part of Dodgson’s interest in women and mature female bodies, but notably she merely acknowledged it without making any effort to tug on the thread she had found, and her awareness of these women in his life did not seem to impact on any conclusion she drew about him. Consistently, while she dealt quite effectively with the new material in all the non-mythic areas of Carroll’s biography – his ancestry, parentage, matters of education and so on – her analysis failed to address that data where it was most needed, in relation to the central images of Carroll. Here she abandoned the new evidence almost entirely and resorted largely to a simple retelling of the tale, turning to conventional depictions of the essentially naïve and gifted man who lived apart from the common run of life in ‘a private world which he barricaded effectively against the outside world in general’.⁵

A naïve genius, untouched somehow by the world he passed through; it was a story instantly familiar. Clark’s essentially Apologist approach allowed no possibility of Carroll as other than personified by his renunciation, so she dealt with the complex issues she had been incisive enough to raise – about the nature of his relationships with women, and indeed young girls, about

his failure to find a happy marriage despite being attractive and attracted to the opposite sex.

For Clark, as with so many Apologists, the deep and almost religious conviction at the heart of her book was her total unshakeable belief in Dodgson's all-consuming romantic attachment to the 'real Alice'. Unlike most Apologists, Clark saw this attachment as at least potentially sexual – but sexual in the way of romantic novels; safely sexual, because the sex is encased neck deep in a big soft scented pillow of tender and idealistic love. Yet, as we have seen with Green and Hudson, little attempt was made to rationalize this image or to apply real-world norms to it. Clark did not engage with the question of how a man who fell in love with an eleven-year-old child and who felt free to express and indulge that love in any form could be at the same time regarded as a 'safe' source of friendship for her. This question was one of the ultimate taboos of the Apologist tradition. The image of Carroll (child-obsessed, child-pursuing but ultimately unaware and 'innocent') created by this tradition existed in a suspension of self-contradiction that would have annihilated it if it hadn't been carefully preserved in a vacuum of non-interrogation.

Nor did she engage with the near total absence of available evidence for that love in the first place. Unlike Taylor, who had also suggested a romantic passion, she was able to consult the entirety of Dodgson's remaining diaries and was therefore in a position to know – should she choose to – that there were none of the confessions of passionate love for Alice Liddell hidden within that earlier writers on the subject had assumed would be there. Although the loss of the four volumes covering the period of Dodgson's developing friendship with the family obviously made firm conclusions uncertain, it remained a fact that Dodgson's surviving diaries did not provide much evidence for the received reading of his relationship with the 'real Alice'. But Clark's analysis did not acknowledge this absence of evidence at all, any more than it acknowledged the contradictions of her narrative. As with Green, when the evidence at her disposal did not tell the story that she expected it to tell she might resort to invention. For example, in describing the little understood break that occurred in 1863 between Dodgson and the Liddell family, Clark could not resist this purple-tinged passage about the anguish Dodgson experienced on being separated from Alice:

He never fully recovered from the pain that accompanied the severance of their relationship: and though eventually other childfriends took over, for years he went on dedicating the fruits of his literary labours to her and her alone.⁶

Clark's analysis did not engage at all with the fact that her sources could provide no evidence to suggest that Dodgson's break with the Liddell family had anything to do with Alice – indeed the document that showed it almost certainly wasn't may already have been available in the Dodgson public archive; nor did it acknowledge that there was no evidence available to indicate that he experienced 'pain' because he wasn't allowed to see her.

But, more importantly, her analysis betrayed no awareness of the fact that the second part of her sentence was not merely questionable, it was quite obviously untrue. Dodgson did not go on 'dedicating the fruits of his literary labours to her and her alone', as anyone can see who looks at his work. Dodgson dedicated the two *Alice* books to Alice Liddell and, so far as we are aware, that is all. In fact, over the years he dedicated the 'fruits of his labours' to numerous different girls, from Gertrude Chataway in 1876 to Enid Stevens in 1893, as the briefest scan of his output will show. For all her groundbreaking work in many areas, Clark's analysis at this point had become as conventional as any other writer on Carroll.

As the database grew so some of its information began to be assimilated and a slightly more realistic or complex picture began to emerge, but only up to a point – and always the same point. The realism always, as if by mutual agreement, stopped short of infiltrating the heart of the mythology; Dodgson's emotional and sexual 'otherness' and his passion – whether sexual or not – for Alice Liddell were exempt from reconsideration. Here the traditional image continued to be paramount; it bypassed any verification and became grafted on to the modern biography along with the genuine evidence, as if it had actually been shown to be true. It would become a tradition of Carroll studies that the source data was not investigated in any methodical or scholarly way and the veridical facts it contained – particularly with regard to the most controversial and myth-laden areas of his life – would simply not be taken up. At the same time 'facts' continued to be sought and developed from the traditional sources of anecdote, myth and imagination. Not only were the old 'facts' continually recycled for years after the evidence was available that could refute them but more 'facts' continued

to be added by modern writers. So, although the available data on Dodgson was by this time quite considerable, its impact on Carroll studies would continue to be quite small, at least in the most central area of his emotional and intellectual life, and most of the major 'facts' continued to evolve quite separately from the source material.

In 1979 the first of a pair of highly influential reference books were published that further emphasized the curious nature of truth in the landscape of Carroll studies. A two-volume edition of Carroll's letters was published under the joint editorship of Roger Lancelyn Green and the new rising star of the Carroll establishment, the American academic Morton N. Cohen. It was an exhaustive and admirable publication, of immense value to scholarship, with footnotes detailing the background to the letters, significant diary entries that tied in with them and brief biographies of many of the correspondents. It was a huge achievement that for the first time allowed a large amount of Dodgson's correspondence to be available for research.

However, even this scholarship was careful to remain within the accepted remit of the myth and its own version of 'factual' reality. The blurb on the dust-jacket primed its readers to expect the 'largest number' of letters inside to be addressed to 'children', and the volumes were flagged as showing Lewis Carroll's quaint (but by implication innocent) obsession with little girls as being the most notable and signifying trait of his life and mind. Presumably the editors (both of whom believed implicitly that Dodgson's life had focused almost solely on juveniles) tried to shape the contents to reflect this viewpoint, so it remains even more remarkable that, whatever the jacket may have claimed, the letters to 'children' quoted in the book were not in a majority at all. In fact, as a recent article shows, the *Letters of Lewis Carroll* contains more letters to adult woman-friends and teenage girls than to children.⁷ The discrepancy was never noted, and the statement in the book's blurb continued to be the perceived reality by which the *Letters of Lewis Carroll* are defined, even though the letters within told another story.

Similarly, the collected memoirs of some of those who had known Dodgson in life, published in 1989, also edited by Morton Cohen and with the title *Interviews and Recollections*, included a suitably large section entitled 'child-friends' that might have appeared to put Dodgson's singular

and total obsession with ‘little girls’ beyond academic doubt. Yet the section had been inflated, if not wholly distorted, by including friends who were not children (two such ‘children’ were actually twenty-four when they first met Dodgson) and children who were scarcely definable as friends. The space devoted to ‘children’ in these reference works is arguably the size of our expectation, not of reality, and the facts have had to be padded to fill it out. They are not reflecting actuality; they are reflecting belief. They are presented as scholastic sources of historical truth, but they are something far more difficult to define than that; they are statements of belief and perhaps have more in common with Gospel than with history.

So, by this time there was what might seem to be a documented and well-sourced verification of many aspects of what ‘Lewis Carroll’ had long been assumed to be. There were modern biographies that appeared to make factual statements and published sources of seemingly reliable *prima facie* data that, on superficial inspection, appeared to be telling the legendary story in a new and serious way.

But beneath the surface things were very different. The impression of verification was virtual rather than real; composed of *faux* certitudes offered as fact by biographers and of flawed analyses of the data by scholars who were drawing conclusions that were sometimes diametrically opposed to the true nature of their own evidence.

This is nowhere more true than in the only published analysis of the missing diary material one can trace prior to 1995.

In January 1982, to mark the 150th anniversary of Dodgson’s birth, Morton Cohen contributed a prestigious article to *The Times* entitled ‘Who Censored Lewis Carroll?’ Cohen was becoming identified as one of the most important Carroll experts. He had worked closely with Roger Lancelyn Green in editing the *Letters* and was – and is – a professional academic who taught for many years at the City University of New York and who had contributed many articles and essays to various publications, including *Jabberwocky*, the journal of the Lewis Carroll Society. He was the first Carrollian to work at all closely with any of the primary evidence in the case, but how he approached that data and what he did with it is interesting.

Illustrated with photographs of Dodgson and his niece Menella, the article asked ‘What happened to the missing volumes?’ ‘Whose hand

wielded the razor that cut the pages?’⁸

It was high time these questions were asked, and credit must go to Cohen for having the vision to step so far outside the Apologist tradition in order to ask them. Yet although he recognized the need for answers he seems to have made little attempt to find them in an objective review of the diaries and letters. In fact, more than anything else, his article is valuable as an overt illustration of that bizarre relationship with veridical reality that had become endemic in the closed world of Carroll studies since its inception.

Cohen’s article was intended to be focused on the missing material, its chronological location and the potential biographical meaning of what had been removed. Given that this was his aim, it would seem reasonable to expect he would be familiar with the subject, that he would at least have gone through the diaries and made a note of how many cut pages there were and where they were located.

With certitude he told the readers of his article that there were ‘six’ pages missing and gave the dates for them, which were 27–29 June 1863, 24 January–2 April 1868 (four consecutive pages) and 24 May–6 June 1879.

The problem was that only two of these (27–29 June 1863 and 24 May–6 June 1879) were actual missing pages. The ‘four pages’ Cohen claimed to be missing that covered January–April 1868 were imaginary. It is true that there are no extant diary entries for that period, but that is because Dodgson never made any; he simply did not write in his diary for quite a long time. There are no cut stumps, no gaps in pagination, nothing to indicate the presence of excised material at all, and there seems no obvious way of explaining why anyone who looked at all closely at the diaries would think there was. But this wasn’t the only problem. Cohen’s analysis also managed to overlook all five of the remaining actual and very real cut text pages, with their quite obvious razored stumps and obvious missing text. His count of ‘six’ missing pages was therefore erroneous.

In part this might be explained by the fact that Cohen was probably making his analysis not from the original manuscripts but from a photocopy he had had made some time before, which would have the effect of making a study of the physical aspect of the diaries quite difficult. The cut stumps where the missing pages have been removed are easy to see in the originals

but virtually undetectable in a photocopy, and this might have led to some confusion. But it ought to be quite easy to see that there is no text missing at the start of 1868, where for some reason, he believed four pages to have been removed and that there *is* significant text missing from, for example, August 1855, where three consecutive pages had been cut out. It seems hard to avoid the conclusion that he had not examined the diaries very thoroughly before writing his article. While this might seem like carelessness, I think it needs to be viewed as something else. In context Cohen's non-analysis can be seen as part of the continuum – at one with Reed's free inventions, Green's apparent willingness not to know what Menella Dodgson was keeping from him and the wholesale disdain of source material by almost every commentator in favour of continued use and reuse of myth.

Viewed in this way, Cohen's failure to inform himself becomes not a failure at all. In 'Carroll' the facts had only ever been a potential artefact, along with fantasy, in the telling of a tale. From the vantage point of the shaman-like tale-telling role of 'Carrollianism' the number and distribution of the missing pages could perhaps be as imaginal as any other aspect. Perhaps it did not matter whether there were six real pages being talked about or six virtual pages; what mattered was the retelling of the tale. The rest of Cohen's article shows that he was continuing to frame his understanding very much from within the Carroll tradition; his claim of four imaginary missing pages was a precursor to more familiar statements – for example, of Carroll's 'preference for the companionship of children', of his passion for Alice Liddell, and he took it for granted that one of the genuine cut pages (May–June 1879) was probably about some 'fracas' between Dodgson and a family whose children he photographed,⁹ even though there was at the time of Cohen's writing a document already in the Dodgson family archive that made it clear that the May–June 1879 page had been not about Carroll at all, let alone any 'fracas' involving children, but about his younger brother Skeffington. Cohen presumably had not seen or chose to ignore this document. He was as convinced of Dodgson's preoccupation with children and Alice Liddell in particular as Carroll experts had always been, and the level of his conviction is shown by the fact that he did not present this viewpoint as a theory or acknowledge alternative possibilities; he presented it as fact, just as Reed, Green, Taylor, Clark *et al.*

had done before him. The only difference was that Cohen went so far as to support these largely unreal facts with largely unreal evidence that he claimed existed in the newly available primary sources. For example:

There is plenty of evidence in the diaries and elsewhere that Carroll loved Alice Liddell as he loved no other living creature. He wanted to marry her and he may very well have intimated as much to the Dean or to Mrs Liddell.¹⁰

Which does seem quite odd, because – as anyone who reads the manuscript diaries can see – there is *not* ‘plenty of evidence’ in the remaining diaries that Carroll loved Alice Liddell ‘as he loved no other living creature’; in fact, there is very little evidence of what he felt about her at all and none whatsoever that he ‘wanted to marry her’. It is no more difficult to discover this than it is to discover how many pages are really missing, and if Cohen had been motivated to recognize and convey this truth he was well able to do so, for he is quite evidently a very good scholar. So, we are left wondering why he made such a blatantly false and easily disproved assertion.

We do not have to assume any deliberate intent on Cohen’s part to deceive any more than we have to assume that of any previous writer. It might be that Cohen’s perception simply had not registered the absence of the long-expected ‘plenty’. Or maybe he was unconsciously engaged in redrawing the evidence; creating a virtual diary to go with the virtual Carroll; a diary with six cut pages and a clear tale of a man who ‘preferred the companionship of children’ and plenty of documentary evidence for a deep and intense passion for Alice. This indeed was the diary engendered by expectation, and for long enough it continued to be far more real in the references made to it than the nine grey notebooks in the British Library and their aggravatingly complex, elliptical and surprising contents.

Whatever the reason, Cohen would continue this methodology when it came to writing his great ‘definitive’ biography some thirteen years later. And this book, while far less mythically absorbed than the *Times* article, would still contain the hallmarks of traditional Carroll studies in its abstracted vagueness about what was reality and what was imagination.

So, in the curious dreamlike way of the Carroll universe, when an identifiable ‘scholarship’ began to emerge, it was in many ways a scholarship

of myth by the methodology of myth. Just as a virtual Carroll had eclipsed the veridical Dodgson, so in a way a virtual 'scholarship' developed to act as a conveyor of the image; a scholarship that while it flirted with the evidence, even dealt with it extensively in some areas, was ultimately about asserting totemic 'facts' that were not facts in any provable sense and had nothing to do with the primary evidence at all. Cohen's enumeration of 'six' missing pages, four of which were imaginary, remained the last word in scholarship for some fourteen years. A count of the missing material was finally done in 1996 and again in 2004, and the exact number of missing text pages was shown to be seven, with two or more additional cuts made presumably by Dodgson when the pages were apparently still blank. But in 1982 it would still be a long while before such mundanities began to emerge.

According to Michael Bakewell, in *Lewis Carroll: A Biography*, published in 1996: 'little girls became the air he breathed and without them he would feel himself withering away ... Like Ruskin he seems to have been alarmed by the sexual reality of mature women.' He added: 'Puberty inevitably brought the majority of Dodgson's child-friendships to an end.'¹¹

Donald Thomas, another 1996 biographer, was similarly content to reproduce ancient certitudes in his book *Lewis Carroll: A Portrait with Background*: 'there was no question that he had become a recluse or that his happiest hours were spent in the company of "little misses" ... rather than in adult conversation.'¹²

Neither of these authors were professional Carrollians. Bakewell is a writer and broadcaster on a variety of topics, and Thomas is a well-respected authority on the seamier side of Victorian life as well as a novelist of some success. Their 'outsider' status should have made them more open to possibilities beyond the narrow Apologist and mythic agenda. Thomas, whose extensive and sympathetic understanding of the complexities of Victorian society made him sensitive to the way in which Dodgson's mode of life brushed the fringes of respectability, took the step of acknowledging how many of Dodgson's child-friends were anything but children: 'The Hatch sisters and Gertrude Chataway were in their twenties. Of the others, almost all were in their teens ... To the end of his life he asked, even importuned, existing child-friends, some of them well past the awkward age, to stay with him in Eastbourne.'¹³ But he could not bring himself to draw the

inevitable conclusions. Instead, he ended by contradicting his discovery, to surrender Dodgson's reputation once again to his little girls. Bakewell's biography hovered on the edge of awareness in the same way. Acknowledging at one point that his subject was 'far from being the shy, retiring don of legend' he quickly forgot this and decided that Carroll was, after all, 'the shy stammering photographer don, [who] never grew up ... [and] utterly depended upon the company and the affection of little girls'.¹⁴

Repeatedly his biography invited consideration of how curious it was that Carroll, who was known to dislike women and society, should have been discovered to have spent so much of his time with both but dismissed such episodes, whatever their frequency and duration, as 'uncharacteristic'. It did not occur to him that there was a paradox involved in a man being perceived to spend the majority of his own life behaving 'uncharacteristically'.

We can see the power of the Carroll legend enforcing a viewpoint on these authors in defiance of the facts they are quoting. The expectation of 'Carroll' is greater than the veridical reality of Dodgson. Perhaps the most extreme form of this phenomenon is to be found in what is most certainly the best biography to have been produced to date.

Morton Cohen is a true scholar and, despite the abiding power of his belief in Carroll's obsession with Alice Liddell and the débâcle of his attempt to catalogue the missing diary material, Cohen was by 1995 clearly striving for a more objective and analytical approach to Carroll's biography than had been traditional. His massive 580-page study, *Lewis Carroll: A Biography*, was an entirely different prospect from any that had gone before. Cohen was by this time familiar with the evidence in a way that surpassed any previous biographer, and his book undoubtedly went further than anyone had attempted in a conscious effort to deal with some of the accretions of legend surrounding his subject.

He brought much-needed analysis to several areas. He reassessed, in a significant and revealing way, the nature of Dodgson's relationship with his father. He allowed the man to emerge from the nursery that the myth had locked him in and allowed him to take repossession of some part of his maturity, his pain and his pleasure. He observed something of the 'complex human being', 'gifted and sensitive' and with 'a wide-ranging and far-

reaching appreciation of the human condition' and the extent to which Dodgson himself manipulated his own image. He observed a man who was rarely disingenuously naïve, who 'occasionally ... played the role of the withdrawn, private person' but 'despite his own characterisation ... was not by nature a recluse or a hermit'.¹⁵ He was aware of Dodgson's ability to deceive not only those who knew him but those who came after and his readiness to acquire a persona to suit a particular situation. He was also aware of how inaccurate and silly some of the earlier writing on Carroll had been.

Unquestionably Cohen's biography was the first to present what seemed to be a believable portrait of a real human being called Charles Dodgson, and this, particularly viewed in terms of the limitations of previous biographies, is a quite massive achievement for which Cohen will always deserve considerable credit.

He did a fine job on relocating the man's social behaviour, some of his philosophies and his general maturity:

He was an extraordinarily gifted man and ... lived a busy and productive life ... had he never written his children's books he would still enjoy a permanent place in posterity in more than one discipline.¹⁶

He also highlighted the potential emotional meaning of a love poetry that finds its inspiration in a passion for a woman's beauty and power:

Charles wrote 'Stolen Waters' in the first person; it was his first public confrontation with sex, seduction ... [it] is the closest Charles comes to revealing his inner self, his biting fears.¹⁷

But when it came to Dodgson's emotional and sexual life Cohen's analysis abruptly halted its attempt at revision and instead fell back on framing its discourse inside the traditional imagery. So, although it offered new insights into the more peripheral aspects of the mythology, it left the two most powerful aspects of it – Carroll's perceived 'obsession' with small girls and his perceived all-consuming romantic love for Alice Liddell – unchallenged. Indeed he went out of his way to reassert both. The reason for this was not the lack of evidence to sustain a revision but an apparent reluctance to engage in such a revision.

Almost everything that Cohen had ever written on the subject of Carroll made it clear that he believed Dodgson's long-supposed paedophilic impulses and passion for Alice Liddell to be 'facts', and he routinely presented them as such. The intensity of this belief seems to have blinded him to the fact that there was as much, if not more, reason to question this as any other aspect of the mythology. Even the data he had collected that seemed to require a change in perception did not seem to make an impact upon his preconceptions. So that his summary of Dodgson as a man 'with differing sexual appetites', with emotions 'focus[ed] on children, not adults', who lived a life filled with rejection and loneliness and 'suppressed and diverted sexual energies' seems, even in the context of his own book, to assert itself in conflict with his own evidence.¹⁸

He was aware of Dodgson's numerous woman-friends mentioned in the diaries and letters, as his text quite clearly refers to them and even discusses them. He even went so far as to comment on the apparent oddness of some of Dodgson's close friendships with married women, wondering what their husbands would have made of the situation.

What did these women make of such attentions? Both Mrs Chad and Mrs Stevens were widows, but Mrs Burch's husband was very much alive ... as was Mrs Poole's ... But all obviously felt free to accept Charles's invitations.¹⁹

He was aware that Dodgson's love poetry invited biographical possibilities and made no attempt to conceal that this poetry was about women, tall, 'perfect', beautiful, seductive and preciously adored. He even, with admirable insight and honesty, identified the misleading quality inherent in Dodgson's term 'child-friends' and allowed the fact that many of these girls were not children.

He continued seeking child-friends as well even if, by his own confession, he now preferred them a bit older ... 'Twenty or thirty years ago', he wrote ... 'ten was about my ideal age for such friends; now twenty or twenty-five is nearer the mark.'²⁰

Yet he did not draw his own research together into the obvious conclusion that Dodgson's emotional landscape may have been as distorted by mythology as any other aspect of his biography. Instead he merely

reported his findings – and then drew conclusions that seemed to be diametrically opposed to them. A single page towards the end of his book illustrates the dichotomy of this aspect of his work. Here he commented extensively on the ambiguity surrounding Dodgson's married women-friends and disclosed the fact that at different times of his life the man had confessed to his favourite age for 'child-friends' as being 'about seventeen' or 'twenty or twenty-five'. But, having cleverly illustrated the complex reality of Dodgson's interest in the opposite sex, a few lines on from these observations he fell back into the language of the myth to describe the man's life, without any apparent sense of inconsistency, as being defined by his dependence on the companionship of children and the 'repeated rejections and inevitable coolings created as the girls grew up'.²¹

This curious selective blindness is revealed again in the way his book is structured, with an entire chapter devoted to what is called 'The Pursuit of Innocents' – Dodgson's presumed and, by implication, ambiguously dangerous pursuit of small, pre-pubescent children. But like the claims on the cover of the collected *Letters* that the majority of letters inside were to children (when they were not), this chapter is an expression of our – or Cohen's – belief, not of verifiable truth. In fact, of the forty letters to presumed pre-pubescent 'innocents' that Cohen quotes in the chapter, eighteen were to girls aged fourteen or more when the letters were written, and, of these, eleven were to women aged over twenty. Cohen apparently could not find enough genuine 'innocents' to fill his chapter, but rather than changing his viewpoint he simply manipulated the data and didn't mention it.

So, despite his excursions into some essential, occasionally quite brilliant, deeper analysis, Cohen's book remained in many ways a domain of myth, as indeed had been much of his earlier writing. His true scholarship was tightly circumscribed and was defined ultimately as much by what it did not do as what it did. In this biography, as in the 1982 article in *The Times*, his style is still prone to the kind of misty vagueness about the distinction between invention and data, and despite many promising excursions his biography ultimately eschews much analysis in favour of the traditional anti-intellectual approach that continued to leave many of the most crucial areas of Carroll's biography unexamined. He declined to attempt any kind of

comparative assessment of the earlier biographical sources or to determine how or from where the current images had been gleaned. He freely availed himself of the most baseless aspects of the mythic 'database' when he wanted to, even quoting that most unreliable commentator Langford Reed.

This vagueness about evidential reality is nowhere more apparent than in his dealings with the so-called 'Alice story'. As we have noted, since the remaining diaries had been sold to the British Library in 1969 it had been quite easy to see that the extant evidence for the long-assumed tragic love story between Alice and Carroll was not very considerable. Perhaps the evidence had once been there in the missing diaries and has been destroyed – this has to remain a possibility. But it must also remain a possibility that it was never there at all. Either way, any scholarly analysis needs to acknowledge the almost total absence of the expected evidence, rather than elide it. But Cohen's biography did not do this at all. Thirteen years after the article in *The Times*, in which he had made the quite unjustifiable claim that Dodgson's diaries revealed that he loved Alice Liddell 'more than he ever loved any other living creature' and that he 'wanted to marry her', Cohen was still apparently on the same mission, and while in his biography he was a little more circumspect and less extreme in his claims he was still prepared to be highly inventive with the truth in order to support his belief.

In general terms his book related the quite specific story we have already encountered in the works of Taylor, Clark, Potter and others, of a would-be paedophilic Dodgson who fell in love with the child Alice Liddell and whose happy association with her was ended brutally when he proposed marriage to her (or perhaps let the idea of marriage slip out unguardedly), thus alarming her family and causing them to banish him from her life. But because his book was cast in the mould of an academic work, and because he was, in other less emotionally resonant areas, paying great attention to quoting his sources, the impression was given that – since he was relating the story as if it were fact – it must be in some sense well sourced; that somewhere in the records there must be some form of evidential basis from which it sprang. In fact he was simply reiterating the story, for which there actually existed little or no substantiation other than the story itself, but there was no textual acknowledgement of this at all. So when he claimed with certitude that Dodgson 'devoted so much of his time to [Alice] and

fashioned his two remarkable fantasies with her as heroine'²² his readers would be unlikely to divine that the image of specialness surrounding Alice did not arise principally from the sources at all; that Dodgson himself had never claimed to devote any more time to Alice than to her sisters or that, far from fashioning his two stories with Alice Liddell as heroine, he had said on at least two occasions that the only thing his heroine shared with Alice Liddell was a name and that *his* Dreamchild was entirely imaginary.²³

Again, when Cohen claimed: 'The cherished image of the real Alice never ceased to live in Charles's memory or to elicit a pang of loss,'²⁴ his readers would be unlikely to divine that Dodgson's feelings on this matter were almost entirely unknown and largely a matter of guesswork. Similarly, when Cohen presented 'Alice's rejection of [Dodgson]' as if it were a matter of fact, referring to it throughout his text repeatedly as a source for Dodgson's unhappiness and 'for the guilt and disappointment that belie the happy man he sometimes claimed to be and for an anguish he bore the rest of his life,'²⁵ few of his readers would be in a position to know that this familiar image – 'Alice's rejection of him' – was sourced merely in the previous biographies and that no *prima facie* evidence could be shown in support of it at all; nor indeed for the idea that Dodgson had ever even been in love with her or in any position in which he could be rejected.

Perhaps the most extreme example of his tendency to graft wholesale invention (either his own or other people's) about the role of Alice Liddell in Dodgson's life on to his otherwise well-sourced academic book, is to be found in Cohen's handling of the curious and still unexplained break in Dodgson's relations with the Liddell family that occurred between 27 and 29 June 1863 and the missing page from his diary that covered this time.

This page and the fact that it covered an obvious period of crisis in Dodgson's relations with the Liddells was first noted by Anne Clark in 1979. The page before the cut records that Dodgson was writing to Mrs Liddell to ask her to 'either to send the children over to be photographed ...' and the rest of the text has vanished with the missing page. Evidently, whatever was written on that page did record some form of severance in the relationship, because before the cut he was recording seeing the Liddell family regularly; after it he hardly mentioned them for some six months and then claimed to be holding 'aloof' from them, 'as I have all this term.' There was some form

of implied crisis involving Dodgson and the Liddell family contained on the missing page and one from which their relationship only partially recovered.²⁶

Unsurprisingly, as soon as it became known, after Clark's biography was published in 1979, the missing page and the crisis it seemed to cover had been assumed to be an aspect of Dodgson's supposed obsession with Alice. It was generally believed that this cut page had probably been removed because it contained some form of admission from Dodgson that he had behaved inappropriately with Alice – or, if you were a devout Apologist, that his intentions had been misunderstood by her unkind family – and had as a consequence been banned from the Liddell family's presence. Most of the post-1979 biographies tended to follow this line. Cohen's biography did so explicitly. But unlike other biographers, who had merely supposed this idea as an inevitable consequence of the perceived idea that Dodgson had been in love with the child, Cohen took this to a new level and claimed he actually had evidential support. He claimed there was an 'Oxford rumor' from 1863 that Dodgson had proposed marriage to Alice at precisely this time: 'Charles aged thirty-one "proposed marriage" to Alice aged eleven. Oxford rumor had it so ...'²⁷

While, of course, rumours cannot be taken as evidence in themselves (there had indeed at some time been rumours about Dodgson and almost every female member of the Liddell family), this initially seems convincing that at least there was some contemporary basis for the idea of a 'marriage proposal' as a reason for the break between Dodgson and the Liddells in 1863. But a closer look reveals something different.

In fact, neither of the rumours that Cohen quotes in his text date from 1863 at all. One of them was actually a story from a woman called Margaret Woods that appeared in a newspaper in 1941 (when of course the 'Alice story' was already widely known). It was written by a woman who had hardly known Dodgson and is so inaccurate that it is almost worthless as a source of information; moreover, it quite clearly refers to a much later time when Alice was grown up and not to 1863.²⁸ The second rumour is contained in a letter from Lord Salisbury to the wife of Lord Chief Justice John Manners, dated 1878. It is a better source than the Woods material – although not much better – but again it is not referring to 1863; it is

referring to a current rumour from the time the letter was written – 1878 – fifteen years after the break with the Liddell family had already happened. Cohen did his best to elide the obvious inconsistency of dating by observing: ‘what revived [Lord Salisbury’s] conjecture more than a decade after Charles’s (*sic*) break with the Liddells remains a mystery’.²⁹

This seems to be intended as an implication for his readers that Salisbury was reopening a pre-existing old rumour from 1863 in his letter. But this is not true.

The complete text of the letter reads:

Dear Lady John,

The author of ‘Alice in Wonderland’ has sent me a complaint not unworthy of Alice herself. I am ashamed to send it to Lord John: so I venture to enclose it to you, trusting your wrath and contempt will be less severe – and that you will convey to me in a mitigated form the imprecations of which he will no doubt deliver himself.

They say that Dodgson has half gone out of his mind in consequence of having been refused by the real Alice (Liddell). It looks like it.

Yours ever truly

Salisbury³⁰

Obviously there is nothing in it to suggest it is reopening an old rumour, either from 1863 or any other time, and Cohen’s attempt to imply otherwise is at best disingenuous. Despite his attempts to imply otherwise, the plain truth he cannot deny is there is currently *no* known extant rumour of any kind connecting Dodgson and Alice in 1863, let alone one about a marriage proposal. It seems that Cohen simply took the myth, invented the idea of a contemporary rumour to try to give it at least some sort of evidential basis and then tried to manipulate the Salisbury letter of fifteen years later to support his invention. This is not the best methodology and sits oddly with Cohen’s punctiliousness in other areas. (Let us not forget, this man had done more than any other to research the evidence in the case.) It calls to mind the odd conduct of Roger Lancelyn Green who used his preface to the first edition of the diaries principally to elide the source evidence as completely as possible and substitute his own reading.

But perhaps the oddest thing about this issue of the missing page is the fact that he, and everyone else, was still claiming to have no idea of what might have been written on it. Because while he was wondering about ‘what could have happened to cut the cord?’ and introducing entirely hypothetical marriage proposals as explanation, there *was* a piece of evidence – the ‘cut pages in diary’ document – readily available that could have told him, at least in outline, exactly how that ‘cord’ had been cut (see [pages 241–2](#) for more detail about this).

At the time Cohen was researching and writing his biography, this document was not simply in the Dodgson archive – it was in the catalogue, listed under ‘cut pages in diary’ quite clearly, yet apparently neither he nor anyone else noticed it. It seems quite odd that Cohen, with his admirable dedication to research, his rigorous combing of the archives, somehow missed this quite crucial piece of paper. An interesting question might be – would the paper have remained invisible in its catalogue for fifteen years if it had said ‘L.C. is told he can never marry Alice and complains of a broken heart’?

Perhaps the most regrettable thing is that in the critical reception of Cohen’s biography his massive achievement in seeing past so much of the mythology in other areas was largely overlooked in favour of his handling of the ‘Alice story’. His book was hailed as definitive, not for its debunking of so much myth but for its development of the most central myth of all. The critical – and indeed his own – emphasis on this most dismally worked aspect of his book seemed to set the seal on Dodgson’s emotional biography. Sadly, for all his scholarship (which was immense and crucial to those who, a few years after his book’s publication, began to unpick the monstrous Carroll legend), it is as the last and greatest defender of the myth that Cohen risks being remembered. And this would be unjust in many ways, despite his seemingly continued bid to achieve that status in the popular mind.

Cohen’s instinctive and apparently irresistible impulse to force a paedophile obsession with Alice Liddell into Dodgson’s biography brought a kind of crazy symmetry to the beginning and the end of the century of Carrollianism. Compare Cohen’s chapter ‘The Pursuit of Innocents’ with Stuart Collingwood’s ‘Child-Friends’. Both feature an almost identical percentage (45 per cent and 42 per cent respectively) of women and older

girls transmogrified into children. A hundred years on nothing had changed but the implied meaning of it all. Collingwood gave the world Carroll as saint. Cohen has given us Carroll as a symbol for the amoral mysticism of the late twentieth century, with deviancy as the price and the stigmata of his distorted sanctity.

The publication of the unexpurgated Dodgson diaries edited by Edward Wakeling of the Lewis Carroll Society, begun in 1994 and completed in 2005, has been a fantastic achievement that has brought huge benefits to all Carroll scholars. For the first time Dodgson's voice was to be allowed to appear in print uncensored, and the amount of source information made available suddenly became far greater than it had ever been. The editor and the society deserve unreserved acknowledgement for this valuable achievement.

Since the text was reproduced entire the potential for any major distortion of Dodgson into 'Carroll' is evidently far less than has ever been the case for any other comparable project. There could not, for example, be the massive excision and unacknowledged editing that did so much to undermine the value of the first publication of the diaries under Roger Lancelyn Green in 1953. But such distortion is still possible – and potentially the more 'dangerous' for being rare and at the same time concealed within the framework of an entirely objective presentation.

Editorial expectation can always unconsciously shape (or misshape) the text. This is never more of a possibility than with Charles Dodgson, where the perception of his life has, for so long, been at such odds with the reality. Any editor of these journals is inevitably faced with the fact that his or her knowledge of the man has been gleaned from biographies wherein 'Carroll' and the Carroll myth are celebrated and Dodgson relatively subsumed. There will be a considerable pressure, all unconscious, on the editor to interpret the writings in as Carroll-like a way as possible and even, on occasion, accidentally to distort those writings to achieve the desired effect. Most instances of this will probably be quite minor, but some can be quite powerfully and regrettably distorting. Almost inevitably, given the background, there are a few such moments in the published texts, and it might be helpful to draw attention to them.

On 31 July 1857, for example, Dodgson is discussing the question of life insurance in relation to future marriage. His original entry reads thus:

Walked to Stapleton in the afternoon with my father. We discussed the subject of insurances, on which I came to these conclusions.

1) Insurance is not ‘tanti’ for one who remains unmarried for life ...³²

But the editor, in the grip of the mythic image of ‘Carroll’ as a man who always knew he would never have a wife, is too hasty and transcribes it thus:

‘Insurance is not ‘tanti’ for *me* who remains unmarried for life ...’ [emphasis added]³³

thus conferring on poor hapless Charles not only the underserved slur of appalling grammar but also the quite spurious idea that at twenty-five he was already a confirmed bachelor. A second edition will perhaps clear his name – and syntax.

Editorial anticipation colouring the text appears again in a lesser form in Volume 4, when Wakeling refers to the rumours recorded in the ‘cut pages in diary’ document connecting Dodgson with ‘Ina’, only to dismiss them as ‘unfounded’.³⁴ This may be the editor’s opinion, and it is not an unreasonable opinion to hold, but the diary is not supposed to contain the editor’s opinions and certainly not the editor’s opinions presented as if they were the truth. It is supposed to contain the simple facts, and the simple fact is that we presently do not know whether the rumours were unfounded or not. The Carroll myth, of course, dictates that they must have been unfounded since in the mythic scenario Dodgson is routinely denied anything approaching a love affair, and it is this myth – I think – which has persuaded the editor to add the word ‘unfounded’ to his text, rather than any objective overview of the data.

Similarly, when he came to write his background notes on the first entry of published Volume 4 (9 May 1862), Wakeling could not help but display his own distance from certain non-mythic aspects of the real Dodgson’s life. Dodgson’s text for that date reads as follows: ‘Finished and sent to the editor of *College Rhymes* a poem I have called “Stolen Waters”’.³⁵

‘Stolen Waters’ is perhaps Dodgson’s strangest and certainly most erotically charged love poem. It is an allegory of seduction, illicit sex and crushing guilt. It tells the story of a young man who has recently taken a vow (presumably of chastity), who is lured from his path by a lithe, beautiful woman, who invites him to share illicit ‘pleasure’ with her. Yet this is how the editor of the diaries sums up the poem (perhaps significantly, he does not quote it):

‘Stolen Waters’ appeared in volume 3 of *College Rhymes* dated Summer 1862 and was signed ‘C.L.D. Ch.Ch.’. The serious poem is a fantasy dream of unfulfilled love for a young maiden.³⁶

This is manifest nonsense. There are no young maidens in this poem nor is it about feeling sad at losing a sweet young thing. It is about sex. Intoxicating, guilty, wildly pleasurable sex. How did the confusion arise? When asked, the editor confided he had not read the poem at all and took the summary from another source (who had presumably not read it either).

It would be desirable if future editions of these volumes were corrected more accurately to reflect the reality, but the present errors are in themselves instructive of the fact that the process that began before Dodgson died is still very active in the collective unconscious – the need to establish a form of ‘Carroll’ that never actually existed and a powerful resistance to documentation that militates too powerfully against this creation.

It has been said that people cannot take very much reality, and this has never seemed more true than in the consideration of the Carroll myth. Today, some nine years after I first published this account of how Carroll’s biography came to be born, the mythic image and the institutionalized ‘unknowing’ that underpinned it is beginning to recede. But it is still there, looming in the collective mind. People like Will Self – who recently described Dodgson as ‘indisputably a paedophile’ – and Waldemar Januszczak (‘the disgusting Lewis Carroll’) happily pass on the old ideas without the slightest idea of the pedigree of the stuff they are reciting.³⁷ The myth still towers over the popular image of Carroll and still dictates the larger part of what is written about him. While the Lewis Carroll Society of the UK is struggling to place itself in the forefront of a bid to encourage a fresh and more scholarly approach, there continues to be a large section of

the Carroll establishment that would prefer the speculation of paedophilia to any attempt to reinvest Dodgson with his forgotten adulthood, his 'unconventional' woman-friendships and the various questions and scandals that attended these.

In a wider context there continues to be relatively little attention paid to Lewis Carroll by academia, which is quite odd given the impact of his work. While Dickens, Thackeray, Wilde *et al.* are more than catered for, with thousands of scholars worldwide running courses on their lives and work, Carroll continues to be very sparsely represented. When the collector Morris Parrish tried to donate his collection to the founding of a Carroll museum in the UK, he could find no one interested enough to take up his offer, and the collection ended up lodged in Princeton with no special museum to house it. Carroll still seems to be more saint than literary figure; perceived as the purview of true believers rather than academics. Even the most modern of resources, the worldwide web, has become colonized first and foremost by the old myth, with very few websites reaching beyond the tired and ancient image of the 'scholar saint' in his ivory tower who loved Alice Liddell and always abandoned his girlfriends when they reached fourteen.

Yet he, his work and his curious biography continue to offer enormous potential for insight into ourselves, our humanity and our relationship with the world. His various layers – the man, the image, the work – seem made for our puzzled postpostmodern world of quantum values and relativity. His two selves – Dodgson and Carroll – are their own ironic commentary on each other and on us. His biography and the biography of his biography and the biography of his creation 'Alice' mesh inseparably. His life is replete with puzzles, his biography likewise; those who wrote about him become a part of the evolving story.

It is now possible to know far more about the details of Charles Dodgson's real life, his intimate thoughts and his personal relationships than Langford Reed or Florence Becker Lennon or all the other people discussed earlier ever did. We can look at this data and see a rather different Carroll from the one with whom we have grown familiar. But that of itself will not tell us why 'Carroll' was born, why it was necessary to invent him. Such questions are the hardest questions to answer because they go very close to the heart of what it means to be a human being with our own odd

relationship with reality. We like to believe we are rational beings and tend to be quite nervous of anything that uncovers how mad our daily lives or thoughts and beliefs really are. Dodgson has always challenged that through his fiction, and this overview suggests that his 'biography' becomes another aspect of that challenge. 'Carroll' grew out of empty space and human need and was tended and watered by people who were not mad but who behaved quite madly in this one area of their experience; the cousins of the gardeners in Wonderland, painting the roses the colour they ought to have been, busy and intent and unaware that they were crazy. He was made by the same species that thinks it makes sense to destroy the rainforests to make dining-tables. The history of 'Carroll' reminds us to be sceptical of our collective wisdom.

PART II

RESTORATION: ASPECTS OF A LOST REALITY

4

Photographing Angels

The only head you could paint to be considered beautiful by *everybody* would be the face of a little girl about eight years old. – John Everett Millais

A rosy child,
Sitting and singing in a garden fair –
... An angel-child ...
– Lewis Carroll, 'Stolen Waters'

IN the 1970s, in the Rosenbach collection in Philadelphia, four images were found depicting the small, round-limbed and very naked bodies of five pre-pubescent female children. They were colour-stained reproductions of four photographs by one of the most mythical literary figures of all time; the only remnants yet found of what had been a large collection of such 'nudities'. They came as no surprise. Since Helmut Gernsheim had published his *Lewis Carroll, Photographer* in 1949 it had been widely known that Charles Dodgson had taken such images. None the less the discovery of these four prints provided the shock of visual confirmation. They portrayed images of childhood that are now only available as pornography. The bold young eyes gazing steadily outward, the nakedness of the young flesh stretched out sacrificially for this man's camera, were a challenge inadmissible. They spoke for the strange ambivalence of the Carroll legend, where everything shimmers with a transient and dangerous beauty; where 'Alice' lives in a golden afternoon of innocent laughter and unspoken desire; where the sun teases the rippling water and a camera lens explores small, vulnerable bodies.

It is here that we find our most familiar images of Carroll. The fact of these small nude bodies, the fact that this grown man chose not simply to associate with girl-children but to admire and photograph their nakedness is

seen, both in biography and in popular culture, to have only one interpretation. His photography is the centrepiece of the delicate indictment of Dodgson as a man who 'desired the companionship of female children' in an extreme and disquieting way.¹

This poignant, almost beautiful, aberrance is familiar; it is famous. We have celebrated its beauty and its strangeness in scholarship and fiction. We have rehearsed, and continue to rehearse, its morals and its meanings. But what we have never done is test its reality. His apparent predilection for the naked bodies of small girls is a facet of his character regarded as 'dangerous' by even the most reticent and determinedly non-Freudian biographers, who, like Derek Hudson, tacitly admit that he was on 'dangerous ground' and that the best that can be said about it is that no harm came to the girls as a result of his behaviour: 'one might have had reason to feel apprehensive for Dodgson as he embarked, in the late seventies, on the new venture of photographing little girls in the nude ...'²

It is taken as an axiom that his pursuit and ownership of such images was as peripheral and anti-social to his own time as it would be to our own. Biography assesses him as it would a man of the late twentieth century who kept a stack of such pictures underneath his bed. But this is an assumption that has its basis in a fundamental failure to understand nineteenth-century culture.

We have seen that the image of Dodgson's 'child-friends', as it presently exists, was largely constructed by the actions of mythology and the efforts of his first biographer to create and maintain what he considered an appropriate image of 'Carroll'. In a different way, but with similar results, his artistic relationship with the girl-child has fallen victim to an almost accidental misconception.

Undeniably Charles Dodgson worshipped the girl image almost as intensely as the Carroll myth suggests. Unquestionably his worship was infused with romance and a kind of sexuality. He relished girl beauty, photographed girl nakedness. But when he did these things he was not, as in the diagnosis of most biographers, simply expressing sexual and emotional deviancy; he was being a man and an artist of his time, refracting through his own complex personality the social and sexual mores of the age.

It is no coincidence that the 'patron saint of children' was born into the era of Blake and lived through the period of our history that invented childhood innocence as a new expression of religion. It is impossible to comprehend Charles Dodgson's personal relationship with the child without first comprehending the extraordinary phenomenon of the nineteenth century's sentimental, romantic worship of the little girl.

To the Victorians, purity and innocence were at the same time two of the most highly regarded virtues and the inspiration of popular art and literature. Purity and innocence, charged with romanticism and erotic sentimentality, created the voice of the age: the voice of Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Charles Kingsley, George Macdonald, Christina Rossetti. The Rousseauesque ideals of Blake and the other revolutionary thinkers of the Age of Enlightenment had been stewed down in this more complacent time into a thick brew of rustic sentimentality, in which Emile and the Nouvelle Héloïse romped in a kindergarten Eden, stripped of their original power and meaning.

The Child, as invented by Victorian sentimentality, was an extraordinary symbol, in which many of the images of Christianity were united with a curious quasi-paganism. As Little Nell and Little Dorrit, as the doe-eyed and martyred heroine of a thousand parlour songs, as the sweet darling of a hundred paintings, her soft beguiling image, sacrificial as the Cross, redemptive as the Madonna, innocently sensual as an earth-sprite, took the place of the crucifix as the towering emblem of Christian sacrifice, and the intellectual, artistic and moral leaders of the age knelt before her in adoration and worship. A visual embodiment of Victorian middle-class culture might be the face of a little girl twenty feet in diameter with the elite on its knees in her shadow.

To worship her was to worship purity; more importantly, perhaps, to be seen to worship her was to be seen to possess that all-important purity by association. To eschew the world and long for nothing more than a return to the innocence of childhood was a cliché of the artistic and literary establishment. Literary society was full of aspiring authors telling each other how much more they valued a child's smile than any amount of literary success and writing poems to demonstrate the truth of it. Almost every poet from Tennyson to Rossetti had his own ode to childhood. Young Tennyson,

still groping for his style, briefly opted for fashionable Blakean imagery and wrote about his 'fairy Lilian':

Flitting, fairy Lilian,
When I ask her if she love me
Claps her tiny hands above me,
Laughing all she can ...³

J. Ashby-Sterry enjoyed considerable success and popularity with his *Boudoir Ballads*, a collection of poems about the delights of little children. He hymned the delights of glimpsing white underwear beneath girlish skirts and bemoaned the end of childhood with an arch sentimentality. 'Two and Two' is a typical example of his style:

Come the dimpled darling pets
With their tresses all in nets
And their snow white pantalettes
Just in view.⁴

In an age that could enjoy this kind of thing, that worshipped 'innocence' and wore it as a fashion accessory, a love for the 'pure' society of children was a synonym for moral integrity. It was therefore claimed by and for many, who in reality had only the slightest justification for it, as a kind of badge of intellectual and moral distinction.

The painter Frederick, Lord Leighton, who privately and unambiguously referred to his pictures of sweet children as 'potboilers', was described after his death in breathless prose as having 'worshipped children' and having felt a 'protecting, caressing tenderness ... towards them'.⁵

Marion Spielmann, the official biographer of that other specialist child painter John Everett Millais, wrote in 1898: 'He saw the beauty of childhood even in ugly children ... His love of children was intuitive and passionate.' These gushing affirmations are eerily similar to the tributes offered to 'Lewis Carroll' at almost exactly the same time. They represent, just as does Collingwood's official biography of Carroll, the public image that Victorians expected of a certain kind of eminent man. It is interesting to note, then, how far they differ from private reality. Another view of Millais's penchant

for drawing children has the painter say dismissively that if the public wanted girls in mob-caps then he would supply them.⁶ In the nineteenth century such cynicism was, publicly, inadmissible, and even the most commercial and mercenary of artists must be shown to wear the obligatory whimsical smile in the presence of the girl-child.

In celebrating her it was the norm to abandon all restraint and hyperventilate into a swooning passion of cloying sentimentality. Even those who, like Dante Gabriel Rossetti, really ought to have known better, succumbed to purple-tinged rapture: 'his mystical lady (now hardly in her ninth year) ... with her virginal bosom and unfathomable eyes,' gushed the hard-boiled old bohemian in prose that would now get him sent straight into corrective treatment.⁷

If the female child was the symbol of this purity, then her pictorial essence was the female child nude. In a dizzying inversion of our present morality, the representation of the naked girl-child was not an expression of marginal pornography and peripheral sexuality but an artistic image as mainstream as the landscape or the adult nude – and far more popular than either. The image of the naked girl-child was perceived by the art world as a source of heavenly beauty, untouched by any manifestation of overt sexual identity; beauty, therefore, in its purest form. Artists and photographers celebrated this innocent sensuality in work we cannot look at today without disquiet. In the brushstrokes and sepia tints of Noel Paton and W.S. Coleman, Oscar Rejlander and Pierre Louÿs, soft-limbed, curvy-cheeked cherubs pose in imitation of the adult classical world. Naked prepubescent chests and buttocks confront the camera, without fear and without shame.

Not only was this infantine imagery a representative of the ideal of beauty for the esoteric high-art movement it was also a staple of middle-brow popular culture. Naked little girls adorned the picture postcards sold in tea shops and bought by decent people on their holidays to give to one another. The respectable middle-class moral majority sent Christmas cards decorated with straight-limbed smiling Venuses baring their hairless pubic mounds. Men and women who might shrink from the supposed indecency of adult nudity felt free to smile and coo and express rapture over naked little girls. Indeed, one could wear one's admiration for the naked child as a

badge of incorruptibility, of an aesthetic perception that existed on a level beyond sexuality.

There were a few dissenters: the Calvinists and evangelicals, who condemned all displays of nudity as a sin; there were the Christina Rossettis, who were uncomfortable with naked fairies in children's literature. But to interpret such dissenters as expressing an anxiety about child exploitation is to give them a twentieth-century outlook they would not easily have comprehended. Even for them it was the nakedness that was the evil, not the fact that it belonged to a child. Our modern construction of a separate and special danger in child nudity hardly existed within their society, even at its most morally self-conscious heart. Child pornography was easily available, but it was seldom viewed with any separate or special distaste. The concept and the word 'paedophile' did not exist until Krafft-Ebing invented it in the 1880s. If, as some clinicians have suggested, one in a sense invents a pathology by giving it a name, the Victorians must be viewed as inhabiting a time before paedophilia had been patented. Whether for good or bad, they had less difficulty than we do in recognizing other meanings in nakedness beside the crude and exploitative invitation. They could believe that a child's nakedness, and adult responses to it, could express purity and an innocent innate sexuality.

To modern eyes this attitude seems both suspect and ridiculous. In our age of heavily commercialized and packaged sexuality nakedness has become a synonym for sexual invitation and nothing else. For us a naked child is a child inviting sexual contact; an exploited child, an abused child. We turn away in shock and horror. We see that these postcard images are separated from pornography only by the fragility of intent and perception. We inevitably speculate about repression and sublimated desires, but this is more about incomprehension than insight.

Intent and perception may be fragile things, but in human terms they are absolutes. Pornography is a thing entirely of the mind. An image is pornographic only if the viewer perceives it to be so. Child nudity is corrupting for us because of all that we bring to it, not because it is about corruption *per se*. If our cultural construct permitted us to perceive only beauty and innocence there, would the corruption still exist in any meaningful sense? In the face of such a question moral certitude dissolves

into metaphysical debate. The modern world might read Francis Kilvert, arch-exponent of girl-sentimentality, and discover a self-confessed paedophile; the Victorians read the same prose as a plangent hymn to the transience of innocence. Are we empowered to say that they were wrong? Kilvert married, had relationships with adult women, but his famous diary was written in the fever of Victorian girl-child-worship in all its sentimental eroticism. We look at it and him – as we look at his age – across a great chasm of cultural incomprehension.

The question is one of cultural mores and not of individual sexuality. Our present certitudes might seem immutable to us, but they are only this year's fashion. They have no place in the age of the child-bride, when the budding breasts of a twelve-year-old could be photographed and soliloquized over for their beauty without the taint of exploitation and deviancy, and Humbert's love for Lolita would have passed almost without remark.

The Victorians relished the ambiguities of adolescence that now torment us. The infantilized Dora in *David Copperfield*, who sat on her husband's knee talking her baby talk, had many real-life counterparts. E.W. Benson, who was to become Archbishop of Canterbury, fell in love with Minnie Sidgwick when he was twenty-four and she was twelve. They married five years later and lived happily together for many years. Dodgson's own brother Wilfred began courting the girl he eventually married when she was only eleven. It was not her youth that worried his family as much as his total want of fortune.

Similarly, when 26-year-old Edgar Allen Poe married his thirteen-year-old cousin Virginia Clemm he was condemned, even by his hypercritical biographer Rufus Wilmot Griswold, not for paedophilia but for marrying a girl 'who was as poor as himself'. For most of Poe's nineteenth-century biographers his marriage to a 'child-bride' was a cause of nothing but sentimentalizing: 'there ... he and she, who was but a child, had dwelt for many years before consciousness of love had entered into their hearts, until one evening when their secret was unveiled to them ... Rarely, if ever before, was poet blessed with so sweet a bride, or with more artless affection than was Poe when he acquired the heart and hand of her.'⁸

Today, of course, he would be sent to gaol or into therapy, and she would be classified as a victim of abuse. But to evaluate his life and sexuality on those terms would be a waste of time.

The inescapable conclusion that we must draw from all this is that if worshipping and romanticizing girl-children, if photographing or drawing their nude bodies are taken to illustrate some kind of perversion, then it is the mass perversion of a mass culture. If Poe and Kilvert and Dodgson and all the other child-worshippers seem imbued with what we call 'paedophilia', it is because to our eyes their age was imbued with it, soaked through with it. When a modern critic looks at Millais's portrait of his daughter, *Cherry Ripe*, and sees not simply a small girl holding a piece of fruit but 'a sexual metaphor ... curvaceous adult female forms in the child's billowing dress ... female genitalia beneath pubic hair in the child's hands below black wristlets, pressed palm to palm between her thighs', the issue is not the sexual inclination of either the painter or the critic; it is one of social perception.⁹ It would be crass and entirely inappropriate to assess Millais's sexuality on this basis, and it has been crass and inappropriate for biography to do so with Dodgson. He was, profoundly, a man of his time.

It is against this background that we have to assess Dodgson's involvement with 'Alice' and her numerous soul sisters. Dodgson adored and flirted with and photographed his girls against the background of a time that found such activities and images desirable, beautiful and innocent. His romance with the girl-child was, as for most of his contemporaries, both an artistic artifice and a quasi-religious response. As a poet, along with the best and worst of his day, he could write with pining triteness about the beguiling innocence of a child's eyes and profess to long to be 'once more a child, for one bright summer's day'.¹⁰ As one of the foremost photographers of his day – 'amateur' only in the sense that he did not make his living out of the business – he followed the girl-fashion just as consciously.

In these days of the dreary ubiquity of family photographs it is hard for us to understand what photography meant to the mid-Victorians. Like computer technology today it was new, incomprehensible, fascinating, revolutionary and understood only by a tiny elite. The business was messy and mystical; the results extraordinary and magical. In the middle years of the nineteenth century everyone wanted to have their photograph taken or

see other people have their photographs taken or else collect albums of photographs of famous people with their autographs carefully pasted underneath. Photography was one of the newest and most charismatic things around, and those happy few who could manipulate the magic process were some of the most favoured people in society. Everyone, from the Prince of Wales to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, wanted their forty-five seconds in front of the lens.

With its heady mix of novelty, bizarre new technology and social status, it was almost inevitable that a young man with Dodgson's curiosity and ambition should be drawn to the business of taking photographs. In early 1856 his uncle Skeffington, who loved new things, bought himself a camera and messed about with it trying to take photographs while his nephew looked on with interest. Then Dodgson's friend Reginald Southey acquired a camera, and the two youths began carrying it around Christ Church photographing almost anything that was likely to stay still for the required length of time. Mostly these tended to be static items like cathedrals, but they also took awkward frozen poses of one another and their friends, looking rigid and impaled in armchairs.

Quickly Dodgson became addicted. He wrote to his uncle asking him to get him his own camera. On 15 May he took his first photograph with his own rosewood box, and something began to happen for him. For a large part of his young life he had struggled intermittently to be a graphic artist and give expression to his obsession with the beauty of the human form. But he had no talent beyond caricature. He never learned to train his hand to capture anything of the beauty he could see. Like Salieri, God had given Dodgson the longing for expression but seemed to have rendered him mute. When he discovered the camera he discovered his artistic voice, and with it he soon learned to sing his own anthem to what he saw as the divinity of God-given beauty.

He had an immediate sympathy and instinct with a camera that he could never discover with a pencil. His figure drawing remained crude and undeveloped, however many years of practice he put in, but as a photographer he quickly became a true artist. The rigid postures of his early efforts quickly gave way to pictures of fluidity, humour and grace that can still dazzle today. He captured moments of life that seemed effortless and

spontaneous, as if they had been taken in an instant not over more than a minute of laborious exposure; a boy glancing back over his shoulder at some unexpected sound; a girl collapsed in a sullen heap of petticoats, gazing forlornly at what looks like a dead pot plant in her hands; a man and a woman looking at each other with knowing love.¹¹ Photography was Dodgson's other genius. If he had never written *Alice* he would still be remembered as one of the foremost photographers of the nineteenth century. And, as later with the *Alice* books and the Alice legend, Dodgson knew how to market his brilliance.

Whatever his later protestations, he was never interested in just giving voice to his creative force; he wanted that voice to be heard where it mattered. The same hard-nosed commercial instinct that would enable him to milk the *Alice* phenomenon to the last drop of its commercial worth drove him to hunt down high-profile sitters for his camera as a means of self-promotion and possible financial benefit. He started as he meant to go on. Only a few months after taking up photography he was trying to sell his prints (the seemingly unpromising subject of a young undergraduate dressed as the Artful Dodger) in a local shop. He received twenty-five orders in a single day. Twelve months later the fledgling artist found sufficient nerve and self-confidence to talk his way unannounced into the home of Tennyson, the Poet Laureate. It says a lot for his charm – and perhaps even more for a slightly dangerous irresistible quality in his personality that would become more and more evident as he matured – that not only was he welcomed by the difficult and irascible Tennyson but he managed to achieve two dinner invitations and a sitting for his camera.¹²

He soon realized that children were more artistically rewarding and popular subjects than undergraduates (even those dressed as the Artful Dodger). On the tide of the child-cult a photographer of children had no shortage of sitters in the large families of Victorian England and no shortage of fond parents keen to purchase his prints. He could travel the country finding free board and lodging in almost any home in exchange for an undertaking to immortalize the little ones. It was a good bargain, and Dodgson soon learned to make the most personal and artistic capital out of it that he could. Families took him into their homes, fed him, put him up for the night and endured the odours, mess and disruption as he turned their

parlours into studios and their cellars into darkrooms. In return he gave them images of the greatest beauty, informed with spontaneity, knowingness and wit.

There is no denying that his child photography is sensual, sometimes heavily so. When his Apologists try to excuse it by denying its erotic charge they are misunderstanding him just as profoundly as those who condemn him as a pervert. Such sensual exploration of childhood and emergent sexuality, that to us seems depraved, was part of what it meant to be a Victorian artist. The portfolios of his most famous contemporaries, Oscar Rejlander and Julia Margaret Cameron, are replete with such images. Rejlander made shadowy studies of small naked buttocks thrusting provocatively at the camera, tiny mouths smiling beckoningly over shoulders. Cameron created naked child portraits of a strange and dreamlike sensuality. Through her misty lens we find intense close-ups of naked chests and pouting mouths.

We must also recognize that our view of Dodgson's art has become as artificially narrowed as our view of his emotional life. He was less wholly obsessed with the anodyne girl-child than many of his contemporaries. He was no Ruskin, hiding his own infantilized inadequacy behind a professed aesthetic distaste for the mature female. Whatever posterity might have said, it is evident that the adult female body interested Dodgson as much as adult female company. He admired 'beautifully formed' and buxom circus performer Louey Webb, relished Rossetti's *Venus Verticordia* and Leighton's massively feminine *Psamathe*. He possessed many artistic images of naked women and made studies of undraped or semi-draped models well advanced into physical maturity. But, like the other evidence of his most adult activities, his enjoyment of such maturity became the victim of the unstoppable drive to reform Dodgson into 'Lewis Carroll'. And, as we have seen, Dodgson himself played some part in making this 'rehabilitation' possible.

The mores of the time meant that child nudes were fashionable and safe, and the evidence of his own correspondence makes it clear that he often used such very young models, like the Henderson and Hatch girls, more because they were comparatively easy to obtain than because he particularly favoured them. He also sought and obtained much older nude or semi-nude

sitters, but the moral climate of the time dictated that as a bachelor he had to be very much more cautious about admitting to any work with older models, particularly as he was enough of a snob to reject 'plebeian' professionals and was therefore obliged to find his subjects from among his own acquaintances. There would be few Victorian middle-class families who would consider allowing their womenfolk of fifteen, twenty or more to stand before his camera nude or in some skimpy 'acrobat' costume. When anyone allowed him this latitude it was an act of trust requiring the greatest delicacy and discretion. To protect himself and his models he was therefore very careful and very circumspect about this aspect of his art, and so were those who came after him.

The photographs he took of such semi-clad young women seem all to have disappeared. Perhaps they were in the envelopes of items 'to be burned unopened' by Dodgson's executors, perhaps some family member – zealously guarding 'Carroll's' reputation – took matters into his or her own hands, or perhaps some examples are still in an old album somewhere waiting to be rediscovered. At present no one knows precisely how many young women modelled for him in his rooftop studio, over how long a period or in precisely what states of dress or undress. Dodgson himself left only sketchy accounts of this aspect of his work, even in his private diaries, enough for us to know that it happened; and the evidence for it has never yet been properly researched or analysed. His older models have not been there in the biography to correct the balance of his work, to show the scope of his interest. Like his women-friends, they have become invisible and weightless beside the great and inflated image of 'children' in his life.

A rare glimpse of this lost area of Dodgson's art is afforded in some letters he wrote to the mother of one of his favourite models, Xie Kitchin. They belong to the closing stages of Dodgson's career, early to mid-1880.

In these letters to a woman he obviously trusted he refers to his photographs of 'young ladies' in 'outré costume' and makes a careful distinction between these and his studies of children. There are also requests to Mrs Kitchin to get him items of 'female attire' for his models, including stockings for young women. On 10 March 1880 Dodgson asks her to buy him 'young ladies' bathing dresses' from a Mr Durrant in Ryde, and by 31 May he is 'mourning' the 'non-arrival' of these 'acrobatic dresses':

For though I have accepted with all resignation the fact that Xie won't be taken in one, yet there are other damsels in the world, and it is quite possible that I would find one not averse to figure as an acrobat. I must however admit that it is less likely I shall find one as beautiful.

At this time Xie was sixteen. He evidently did not give up on the idea of a semi-draped study of her immediately, for again on 2 June he wrote: 'The [acrobat] dresses look charming ... It is a pity Xie doesn't like them for a photo ... but ... I've found one young lady of 15 who will come and be done in it.'¹³

Exactly who this young lady was it is not possible to establish, but it may have been Gerida Drage, one of two extraordinarily named sisters who began sitting for him at about this time. Their exact ages are not known, but Gerida, the younger, was about sixteen; Gertrude was approaching twenty. At least one of them, and possibly both, did pose for him in a state of semi-dress at around this time.

This small fragment of correspondence with someone he trusted sufficiently to at least partly let his guard down lets us see the lie of Dodgson's own claim to have 'no interest in adult forms'. Gertrude, Gerida, Xie and company must be judged to be the tip of an artistic iceberg. Almost certainly, as his letters suggest, there were other such fearlessly liberated 'young ladies' over the course of his photographic career who modelled for him in 'outré costume', whose names he was too delicate to record in his journal and whose images have perished in the cleansing fire that turned Dodgson into Carroll.

Once the cultural basis for Dodgson's child-worship is acknowledged, and once the full complexity of his artistic and personal relationships with the opposite sex begin to be discerned, then the basis for any serious contention of emotional perversion all but disappears. There remains nothing in the evidence to suggest that Dodgson's adoration of the girl-child should be diagnosed as any more deviant than Millais's or Rejlander's or any other member of the 'worldwide community of child-worshippers'.¹⁴ His work and his life give ample testimony to a heterosexual response to the adult women around him. He owned images of their naked bodies and enjoyed close romanticized relationships with them that were rumoured to

have been sexual at the time and might have been interpreted as such in a biography not in the grip of the image of deviant virginity.

For Dodgson, the girl-child was a central expression and emotional focus in his life but not in any of the ways the current biography believes. She was not a sexual fetish or an avoidance of unwelcome adulthood. As 'Sylvie', as 'Beatrice' and the unnamed angel-child of his poetry, her pivotal role in his life was as the cleanser of his grubby soul. In his poetry his objects of frank desire are women, powerful seducers, 'tall and lithe and fair' or the 'star of perfect womanhood', with whom he finds sinful pleasure or intense love.¹⁵ The girl-child, by contrast, is Madonna-redeemer, the most sanctified and the most artificial aspect of his internal trinity of femaleness. Beside the other two incarnations – the woman-beloved (personified by Lady Muriel and the unnamed loved ones of his verse) and the Fury (Tabikat, the Queen of Hearts) – she is an anaemic and pretentious creature, with one eye always cast upon the audience she is designed to impress.

Dodgson's personal angel-child, a grotesque of virtue and cloying sweetness, was the personification of a kind of innocence Dodgson knew he ought to admire, even if he did not always do so. She was both an aspirational image of his best self and a camouflage for his more controversial activities. '*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*,' he said of himself: 'I recognize the better way but follow the worse.'¹⁶ The angel-child was the symbol of that aspiration and that shortfall. She was both intensely emotional Madonna-image and cynically employed fig-leaf.

If a dichotomy was, as almost everyone seems to believe, at the heart of Lewis Carroll's genius then it was not the dichotomy of repressed and denied deviant sexuality but the struggle between the better way and the worse, between his moral aspirations and his impulses, that he never succeeded in fully reconciling. It has been noted by others that he was a man from a very conventional background whose instincts rebelled against conventionalism. But the significance of this has been obscured by the misunderstandings surrounding the labyrinthine complexity of Dodgson's personal morality.

'Carroll's' legendary primness is the other defining marker of his mythic status, his sanctified otherness. He is universally portrayed as a rigid, socially conservative puritan, and most aspects of his biography are interpreted within that certainty, to the extent that when Carroll objected to

a window-cleaner appearing at his window while he was dressing it is taken to indicate his old-fashioned prudishness, as if most people habitually stripped off in front of strangers and thought nothing of it. When he called his male friends by their surnames only it is supposed to be because he was 'formal to a fault' and not simply that he was a Victorian and inevitably behaved like a Victorian. Like tall hats, the common politenesses of nineteenth-century society and the ordinary self-consciousness of human nature become mustered into the display of an image and, like the two-dimensional representation of the 'child-friends', it has served to obscure some important, even central, biographical realities.¹⁷

This modern reputation for impossible primness has derived partly from the overwhelming myth of Carroll the saint and partly from a misreading of his own self-descriptions. Nothing about him lent itself to easy summation, and his morality was no exception. He could appear to his contemporaries, and to us, as either licentiate or prude. He talked of bowdlerizing Bowdler's Shakespeare, yet owned books of poetry that most of his contemporaries would have deemed pornographic. He took offence at a single 'Damn me!' uttered on stage and yet sent up the pious religious tracts of his day in his own writing. He complained of an actor drawing attention to his (clothed) buttocks on stage, yet he owned images portraying naked female back views and loved the studies of 'downward rippling curves'.¹⁸

The well-developed English tendency to turn sexual matters into something of a sniggerfest repelled him. He loathed innuendo and nudge-nudge humour. In his later life, when his colleagues told dirty jokes he did not laugh, so they remembered him as a prim old don. It was an easy label, and it fitted the 'Lewis Carroll' mythology that was already active in the 1890s. But it was never more than a crude over-simplification. The same man who declined to laugh at common-room vulgarity had *Tristram Shandy* on his bookshelf and lived a private life that brought him into direct conflict with the moral majority, the vociferous puritan middle class that he liked to personify with the old appellation of 'Mrs Grundy'.

Dodgson's morality was never anything as coherent as a philosophy. It was part heartfelt belief, part opportunistic posturing, part lip-service to a set of learned codes he invoked only when he wanted to. Like everything

else about him, it tended to be changeable. He could assume both extreme, almost Calvinistic prudishness and challenging broad-mindedness.

In an inversion of genuine 'primness' he professed detestation of the coyness and allusiveness and innuendo of respectable Victorian society. He preferred matters sexual to be dealt with in 'plain Saxon English', which for him 'robbed it of all that could suggest evil'. He was comfortable with a frank and open treatment of sexual subjects as a natural part of life, even if this entailed an explicitness quite outrageous to most people in his society. When he visited the law courts to hear a case of indecent assault tried, he did not recoil in prudish disgust, he 'admired the ... straight-forward way in which the case was dealt with'. As an artist he loathed the faux purity of coyly concealed breasts and loins. 'I object to all partly clothed figures, altogether ... I will have none but wholly clothed, or wholly nude (which, to my mind, are not improper at all).'

¹⁹

His library presents us with evidence of the inappropriateness of his reputation for nervous prudery. He read widely on the subjects of marriage, prostitution, the female condition and female sexuality. He owned more than thirty volumes on these and allied themes, and many of them were by writers who were progressives of their time, such as John Wade and Alexander Walker, who hymned the healthiness of human sexual desire and the joys of equality in marriage. As well as *Tristram Shandy*, dismissed as obscene by the moral guardians of his time, he owned a wide variety of poetry and literature, some of it considered shocking. Meredith's *Modern Love* – a mature analysis of failing marriage and the pain of adultery – was there. And he owned a first edition of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*, the book that had been condemned as 'bestial and loathsome', 'prurient trash' and withdrawn from sale when it appeared in 1866. Many of the common-room purveyors of innuendo who thought him prim would have been shocked by its heated exploration of sado-masochism and homosexuality. Even Dante Gabriel Rossetti, not known for moral squeamishness, was nonplussed by it. But the man who was Lewis Carroll owned the book and read the book and described Swinburne with glowing enthusiasm as 'the greatest living master of language.'

²⁰

While crudity sometimes repelled him, he welcomed sensuality. It was an inescapable part of his life. He was an intensely sensual man, deeply

responsive to the physical world around him, fascinated and curious about the female body. Physical contact with other human beings was essential to him. To hug and cuddle and kiss a beloved gave his life warmth and meaning. He found beauty and godliness in the naked human form. He was almost Swedenborgian in finding a kind of religious expression in the sensuality he found there and, again like Swedenborg's followers, he saw the validity and morality of human relationships as defined entirely by 'love'. He confessed to seeing marriage in a very modern, non-Victorian way. Two people who loved each other and united in committed sexual union with each other were, he said, 'married in God's sight' even if they had made no formal vows and, as a corollary to this, an empty loveless union was a 'sin against God'.²¹

As he attained middle age Dodgson became increasingly outspoken about his own convictions, increasingly determined to live his life as he wanted and increasingly nervous about the scandals this attracted. He became more and more open about his 'unconventional' relationships with women, less discreet about his photography of girls far too old to be considered sexually safe. His letters from his middle years make it clear that he was well aware of the growing fragility of his resulting reputation. He was talked about, and the talk angered him. He considered his life to be his own business and no one else's and resented the interference and judgement of self-appointed moral guardians.

But his central difficulty was his own confused response to his notoriety. Sometimes he almost seemed to take pleasure in open defiance: 'As some folk are said to "live on the smiles of Fortune", so may I be said to live on the frowns of Mrs Grundy.' 'Mrs G. is no doubt busy talking about another young friend of mine – a mere child, only 4 or 5 and 20 – whom I have brought down from town ... Is it not an outré proceeding, well worthy of Mrs G.'s attention?'²²

Sometimes he seemed to lose his nerve and scramble to be identified with the extreme, even a caricature, of evangelical correctness. 'I have not seen [*The Second Mrs Tanqueray*] and do not mean to ... I consider it is a play that ought not to be acted,' wrote the man who adored Swinburne. 'Would you kindly do no sketches, or photos, for me, on a Sunday?' wrote

the same man who routinely spent the Lord's day in the company of a married woman-friend.²³

This was nothing as simple as hypocrisy; it was more a kind of mental and emotional schism. For reasons we will look for later he was unable to complete the separation from middle-class morality that he had begun and that his own instincts demanded. He would not live within the confines dictated by 'Mrs Grundy' but neither could he entirely reject her. Instead, he remained to the end of his life the prisoner of an uncomfortable ambivalence, with a life that hovered uneasily on the very edges of respectability, restlessly crossing and recrossing the line; a nervous, divided man, condemning mildly scurrilous literature with pompous and exaggerated rectitude at one moment, mocking the parochial puritanism of his time at the next. He played a risky game of dare with the frightening absolutes of Victorian society: taunting, defying, then running for cover with the teeth of retribution snapping at his tail.

When he lost his nerve and sought social approval he frequently did so through the only common language he and Mrs G. spoke – the lingua franca of the angel-child. He became adept at the necessary pretences, at glossing over the awkward facts of his own life, to acquire a temporary veneer of spotless rectitude. He had almost a sixth sense for what people wanted to hear. The man who was privately moved to delight by the 'beautifully formed' body of Louey Webb could also sit in the drawing-rooms of respectability and assure those who were only too glad to hear it that he was pure enough to find no beauty in the adult form. At the same time that he was actively seeking young women to model for him, he was avowing to one of his illustrators that he did not like older subjects and that a girl of twelve was his 'ideal of beauty of form'.

To a man of the world, like his publisher Alexander Macmillan, he could be more frank and admit knowingly that his 'favourite age' for a girl was 'about seventeen', while a widowed lady such as the artist Edith Shute was unctuously reassured of his 'innocence' by being told that he dealt exclusively in children. His own formidable charm, as well as the growing power of the Carroll legend, allowed him repeatedly to get away with the sleight of hand that kept his reputation just short of ruin.²⁴

It looks like the most cynical manipulation, but to dismiss it entirely on those terms is to misunderstand it. When he denied his interest in adult women's bodies and avowed that 'a girl of twelve is my idea of beauty of form', he was not simply and cynically manipulating the truth (although he was most certainly doing so in part); he was acknowledging an aspirational ideal, a world of perfect purity, where his aesthetic response could be entirely disconnected from his loins. It might not be entirely true, but he knew it ought to be, and pretending could sometimes bring it a little closer.

The girl-child was the glue that held a contradictory set of mental attitudes together: at once the fig-leaf for his more controversial activities and the only aspect of his complex love affair with the female sex about which he was able to be entirely open without attracting censure. Perhaps, while he sat, a transitory guest at Mrs Grundy's tea-table, basking in the reflected virtue of his avowed and exclusive passion for child-beauty, he forgot his own reality enough almost to believe he meant it.

Lewis Carroll was not a lonely deviant or a victim of infantilism. He was a man who tried to reconcile orthodoxy and radicalism in a single philosophy and succeeded only in being contradictory, disingenuous and unfulfilled. He effected a half-rebellion against the life he had been born into but could not – or would not – complete a severance that his own beliefs ought to have made inevitable. His sexual and emotional life was the arena for a continuing struggle between his own promptings and his desire for social acceptance.

He was perhaps, before anything else, a man who adored and relished every aspect of femaleness, who responded sensually and emotionally to female company and who required the comfort and stimulus this gave him to provide meaning in his life. His instincts were towards being a lover of the opposite sex, in the full and generous meaning of the word, and it can be argued that it was the most powerful motivating force in his life. His literature, his religion, his sin and his redemption were all fed by this drive towards the possession and adoration of the condition of femaleness. In another age, with another social background, this passion might have manifested exclusively as hedonism or sexual licence. But the nature of his ambiguous rebellion dictated that, instead, it should refract into a rainbow of expressions from, at one extreme, a kind of promiscuous greed for the

female – her image, her love, her physical proximity – and, at the other, the cutesy sentimentality of the Victorian child-religion.

We shall explore Dodgson's life in more detail to try to discover some possible answers for the many questions raised by this review of his mythology. What initiated his emotional rebellion and what prevented its completion? In the absence of the certitudes provided by mythology for so many key aspects of his life and literature, what are we to make of the man and his genius? If he was not a lonely deviant or a strange asexual obsessive; if he was not a man defined by 'his desires and open preference for the companionship, the love, of little ones,'²⁵ then what can we say he was – or might have been?

5

The Faculty

He was a little hard as young men are apt to be. But there was something reassuring in his very hardness and faith in himself and his own doings. It was reassuring because it was a genuine expression of youthful strength and power. No bad man could have that perfect confidence.

– Anne Thackeray, *From an Island*

CHRIST Church in the nineteenth century was no one's idea of a thinking-man's college. It might not have been the oldest foundation, it might have owed its existence to an East Anglian butcher with social pretensions,¹ but more than any other Oxford college it was dominated by wealth, by privilege, by custom and precedent. It was beset by unfathomable rituals. It had its own pack of hunting beagles and always did well on the river. The sons of the aristocracy went there to play cards and mess about in boats and commit acts of gross vandalism. Too rich to need to work, steeped in that particularly English upper-class philistinism that sees intelligence as a sign of poor breeding, they littered the place with their dogs and their servants and their vast contempt for anything that was not them.

Christ Church called itself the House, and as far as it was concerned, with its wealth and its grandeur, it *was* the university. The foundation itself was constructed on medieval principles. Alone among the Oxford colleges it had no written statutes and was accountable only to iron-clad tradition. More than most colleges it was dominated by the power of the Church. Its private chapel was also the diocesan cathedral of Oxford. Its Dean was therefore not merely the master of a college but a powerful figure of Anglican Church authority. Together with the cathedral Canons he exercised a considerable, if not awesome, authority. The Dean was not surprisingly, therefore, a Crown appointee, springing from the heart of the

Victorian political and religious establishment. It was a tremendously important – and even more tremendously lucrative – appointment.

Apart from the Dean and Canons, the other, and very junior, arm of the college's governing body were the Students. These worthies were distinguished from the undergraduate students by their obligatory capital letter, and they were an institution unique to Christ Church. The closest parallel in any other college would be the Fellow, but this is a very inexact comparison. A Student was appointed by the governing body; he was generally a postgraduate; he had to be unmarried and in full holy orders and, once appointed, the Studentship was his for life or until he abandoned his celibate state and took a wife. It brought with it a small income and the right to reside in college for the duration of his tenure.

A Student was expected to undertake some teaching duties, although this was not compulsory, and his precise role within the college was apt to become amorphous. Some Students occupied teaching posts at Christ Church, others went out into the world, married and gave up their entitlements; others just lived in the bosom of the House, devoid of responsibility or any recognizable role, growing old, taking up space often required for other purposes, until they died. Before the reforms of 1858 there were 101 of these Students attached to the college. They were the closest thing to an academic Fellowship that the college could boast, but their influence on college affairs, compared to that of the Dean and his Canons, was very small, and this was to be a source of growing tension during Dodgson's early years there.

In 1850, the year Dodgson matriculated, the college was approaching a crisis, although it did not yet know it. Hostility between the cathedral Chapter and the Students bubbled just below the surface. The Dean was aged and ageing. The man who would be appointed to take his place would prove a kind of nemesis both for the college and for Dodgson personally. If he had gone to any other foundation, Balliol, for example, with its reputation for academic achievement, or Pembroke, where the arts were celebrated, the course of his life might have been altered entirely. But his father's loyalty decided the matter; he went to Christ Church, and certain things became inevitable.

The complicated system of tradition at the House gave each of the Christ Church Canons a turn at nominating their own chosen candidates for available Studentships. One of the Canons of Christ Church was Edward Bouverie Pusey, High Church Tractarian, Tory and a close friend of Dodgson's father. The two men had known each other since they had both been Students at that same House in the years before Victoria came to the throne. They were united in religious conviction. In December 1852 it was Pusey's turn to nominate a Student, and what was more natural than that he should decide to help out an old friend as well as honour high achievement? He therefore spoke to young Charles and told him that he was prepared to nominate him for a Studentship but with one very important string attached. Pusey had, in the words of one commentator, an 'obscurantist dread of worldly influence' and something of a mission to see that promising young men took their place in the Church. He would urge young men to be ordained at the earliest possible period: 'if only the youth were pious, earnest, docile, the great thing was to fix, to secure, to capture him.'² Pusey was not interested in supporting even the son of an old friend if he were not destined for holy orders, and he made this clear to young Dodgson. At the time this did not seem to be a difficulty. Dodgson had been destined for the priesthood almost from birth. He assured Pusey that he was intending to proceed to holy orders, and so Pusey nominated him. Thus, with Pusey's favour, in December 1852 Charles Dodgson became one of the number of Christ Church Students. He was awarded the sum of twenty-five pounds a year and allowed to reside in college for life or until he should take a wife.

His life was moving along a very definite and almost unavoidable course. His Studentship required him to proceed to holy orders. After achieving his Master of Arts it would be expected that he become a priest, find a living or some other employment, take a wife and settle down as his father had before him to a respectable and relatively obscure existence. This was the life that was planned for him, the life his family expected for him. He was the eldest son; the keeper of the family honour, family tradition and the family flame. Was there at this stage any suggestion that he would reject it all, betray his binding promise to Pusey and find his own very different way?

One of the earliest direct glimpses we are afforded of Dodgson as something more than a collection of dates arrives in the summer of 1854. In

that summer he was twenty-two and aiming to take his degree in a few months' time. To prepare for this he and a group of friends, Thomas Fowler, William Ranken and others, went on a mathematical 'reading party' to Whitby under the tutelage of Professor Bartholomew Price. This excursion is usually presented as a very worthy and studious exercise, in the manner expected of Lewis Carroll. In reality, the institution of the nineteenth-century Oxbridge summer 'reading party' was often little more than an excuse for some privileged young men to get together without too much mature supervision to do the kind of things they found amusing. Intellectual improvement was very much an afterthought.

When future poet Arthur Hugh Clough went on such a mind-improving venture to Scotland in 1847 it was recorded in his diary as a series of sightseeing excursions, with some references to encounters with the opposite sex. One of his companions remembered the experience as a prolonged riot and told a jolly and rollicking story of turning up at dead of night at a Scottish inn and endeavouring to discover if there were other Oxford men inside by climbing through the window and rifling the contents of the bedrooms. A sock with the owner's name was noisily discovered and considered proof of friends within. Clough immortalized his experiences in his poem 'The Bothie of Tober-na-vuolich', which celebrated the charms of Highland washer-girls 'showing their thighs were more white than the clothes they trod'.³

The evidence remaining of Dodgson's time at Whitby is fragmentary. The volume of his diary dealing with this episode is, perhaps not entirely coincidentally, among those missing. But all the surviving documentation – a few letters and Dodgson's earliest published work – suggests unequivocally that Professor Price's reading party was no sombre gathering of reclusive bookworms.

A long, gossipy letter to his sister Mary, dated 23 August, keeps the family posted on where he has been and what he has been doing. In the jumble of narrative about buying poetry books, sending his shirts home and watching his friend Wheeler helping out at a shambolic school feast, his studies receive only cursory mention. 'I am doing Integral Calculus ... now and getting on very swimmingly,' he writes, almost as an afterthought at the end of the letter. He asks Mary to thank his father for 'his essay on

Multiplication of Lines’ and passes on a few comments related to it. But the bulk of the letter is devoted to a breezy description of a day out to Goathland to see a famous beauty spot that they thought was called ‘Mary-Ann’s Spout’ but which turned out, much more prosaically, to be ‘Mallyan’s Spout’. His story gives an interesting insight into Charles the man hardly more than boy.

When they got to the famous spot they thought it ‘a “poor little feeble fluttering thing” scarcely worth so much trouble to see’. Perhaps in search of diversion Dodgson decided to climb a cliff back to the railway station rather than opt for the more pedestrian route, and his friends followed him. With innocent bravado he tells of the steep and risky climb, nearly falling and hanging on to a tree root, of soil cascading down on to his friend below who ‘thought I was throwing it down in fun’; of he and his chums arriving at the top covered in mud and having to ‘boast as much as possible of our feat, to prevent ridicule at our appearance’. His friend’s casual assumption, that Dodgson was perched halfway up a cliff pelting him with clods of soil, is revealing; such things were apparently part of the common currency of their relationship.⁴

Exploits like these, however lacking in gravitas, were things he could quite easily confess to his family. Other slightly less wholesome activities are suggested by two items that appeared in print within three weeks of each other in the same month that he wrote this letter. Like Clough, Dodgson made use of his ‘reading-party’ experiences in his work and published two frothy little pieces in the *Whitby Gazette* while he was there. They are notable chiefly for their autobiographical implications. Both conceits, one a short story, the other a poem, are set in Whitby itself and both tell the story of young middle-class men who get drunk and / or make fools of themselves with working-class girls. The action of the poem, ‘The Lady of the Ladle’, begins memorably:

The youth at eve had drunk his fill
Where stands the Royal on the hill ...

The ‘Royal’ was a real hotel and Whitby landmark that is still there today, situated just down the road from Dodgson’s lodgings. It was his local, and it seems likely he knew it well (not even Collingwood could deny that Dodgson always enjoyed a drink). Both of the pieces he wrote for the

Gazette involve public bars and booze and show casual familiarity with their rituals as well as a naïve relish for the humour of drunkenness.

The other theme both works share is the young middle-class man dallying with girls who are his social inferiors. In the poem quoted, the hero 'loved, and loved a cook', a girl called Matilda, who goes off on the ferry and leaves him idiotically bereft:

She is gone by the 'Hilda',
She is lost unto Whitby,
And her name is Matilda,
Which my heart it was smit by.⁵

In the story, 'Wilhelm von Schmitz', the eponymous would-be poet, is in love with a barmaid called Sukie, who delivers 'two goes of 'arf and 'arf' to customers in the tap room. He thinks he has lost her to a waiter, gets drunk and recites bad love poetry, while his companion sings himself to sleep under the table. In the end, after some further misadventures, the hero gets his heart's desire: Sukie herself and his own public house. The last line is full of the ready cynicism of a youth who considers himself a man of the world: 'His after happiness who dare to doubt? has he not Sukie? and having her, he is content.'⁶

'Wilhelm von Schmitz', with his literary pretensions and assumed sophistication, is at least a partial self-parody, but if 'Sukie' and 'Tilda' had any real-life counterpart for Dodgson during his summer in Whitby then the evidence for it probably perished with the missing volume of his diary that covers this period. To his biographers, the possibility that he may at this time, like so many other young men of his class, have turned to an obliging member of the proletariat for amusement or instruction is, of course, the wildest heresy, but there is ample circumstantial evidence in his own writing to show that his thoughts at least were inclining that way. Only the mythology of his essential virginity makes anything more seem unlikely.

Neat and witty, slight and amusing, these works betray the topics that absorbed him and his friends in between the study periods during the seaside summer of 1854. They are written with easy assurance and a breezy use of contemporary idiom, and they are written by a youth who, at twenty-two, already knows enough to look back on his childhood days of 'pinafores,

treacle and innocence' and feel rather pleased with himself about his new worldliness. There is nothing here to lend support to the popular idea of insularity, excessive prudishness or social isolation. On the contrary, there is the suggestion that he shared young men's usual preoccupations with drink and the opposite sex.

Parenthetically, it is interesting to note that one member of the Whitby party, Thomas Fowler, recorded his memories of the time many years later. By this time, 1898, his friend had become famous and died, leaving Carroll behind. Fowler might have remembered the cliff-climbing and the mud-throwing, the jokes about girls and pubs and falling down drunk; but he did not. Those things had belonged to Charles Dodgson and were already unimportant. What Fowler remembered was 'Lewis Carroll' sitting on a rock by the sea, telling *Alice in Wonderland* (ten years before it was written) to the little children gathered about. Romantic, with the quasi-religious hint of 'suffer little children', it was the Victorian image in its ultimate refinement.⁷

A few months after this Whitby holiday, in December 1854, Dodgson won a first-class degree in Mathematics and a third in Greats; not quite as high-flying as his father but high enough. His pride and excitement in his first bubble out of one of his letters home: 'Enclosed you will find a list, which I expect you to rejoice over considerably: it will take me more than a day to believe it I expect – I feel at present very like a child with a new toy, but I dare say I shall be tired of it soon, and wish to be Pope of Rome next.'⁸

A fine academic career was his for the taking. His goal was what he called 'independence' – in other words, financial self-sufficiency. It might be significant that he was already anxious not to be dependent on his father as a source of income. He took the job of Sub-Librarian at Christ Church and regretted that the salary of £35 a year was 'not much towards independence'.⁹ A more substantial income, and career advancement, came his way in August 1855 when he was awarded the college Mathematical Lectureship on a salary of £300 a year. At hardly more than twenty years old he was thus often required to have authority over older men than he and of a higher social class. He found this hard; he was inexperienced and had little inclination for the job of teaching algebra to bored or stupid undergraduates. But he was ambitious, and the money was an important factor in his determination to persist and acquit himself well.

A few months before this his own voice becomes available to the biographer for the first time. He had begun keeping a 'private journal' some time in 1853, but the notebook containing the record for the first two years is one of the four that have been 'lost'. The first surviving volume begins on 1 January 1855.

Dodgson is approaching his twenty-third birthday and is no doubt well aware that nature has favoured him. He was attractive, intelligent, quick-witted and entertaining with what seems to have been a rare gift for inspiring love in people, particularly females. On the deficit side, he was – as we have seen – deaf in his right ear, and, in conjunction with most of his siblings, he suffered from an occasionally debilitating stammer.

His affliction seems to have varied in intensity at different times of his life, from the barely noticeable to the truly disabling. Many people who knew him left their impressions of it. Some describe no more than an occasionally trembling lip or a hesitation in his speech that was almost attractive. One woman-friend described it as a 'true raconteur's trick', a conscious use of charm: 'I fancied he would often deliberately use it to heighten expectancy by delaying the point of his stories.'¹⁰ While others describe bouts of helpless and mortifying stammering where he would become completely 'locked up' and unable for a moment to utter a word. He was acutely aware of it, more conscious of it than most people he met and desperately embarrassed by its slightest manifestation. He struggled throughout his life to defeat this, to him, appalling deficit in his armoury of charm and physical attractiveness. He consulted various speech therapists and had books in his library on vocal exercises and voice improvement. Sometimes he found himself entirely free of its curse and was full of optimism; at other times he reported himself 'in a bad way' and seemed despondent. It was probably a sensitive barometer to his general psychological state. But, in an indication of his truly formidable determination, he never let it conquer him and had sufficient drive to make himself preach from the pulpit, even though the shame of becoming suddenly tongue-tied terrified him.

Modern opinion varies over the causes of this affliction. It is more common in boys, and a possible genetic factor is indicated by a pronounced tendency for stammering to run in families. There is also the suggestion that

it is linked to a stressful family environment, in particular a dominant parent with high expectations of his children. At least seven of the eleven Dodgson children stammered to some degree. Is this nature at work, the inevitability of defective genetic inheritance in cousin-marriages? Or is it too much overbearing paternal nurture? Is the legacy of seven speech-impaired children evidence of profound psychological abuse? Factors about the father make it necessary to consider the latter possibility.

Charles Dodgson senior was a man of 'deep piety', with what his circumspect grandson, Stuart Collingwood, was to call 'a somewhat reserved and grave disposition'.¹¹ The remaining evidence of his character does not present a particularly appealing impression. He seems to have had a didactic, unquestioning mind, and there is the sense of the kind of subtly brutal nature that was well suited to the sectarian internecine warfare of his day. He was involved in several bitter religious quarrels. His term of office as Canon of Ripon was punctuated by more than one row over matters of dogma. In the early 1850s Bishop Longley had to use his personal influence to rescue Dodgson senior from the fall-out from his pronouncement of vigorous pro-Catholic sentiment. And the old man did not mellow with age.

When he was sixty-three he was still inviting controversy by publicly denouncing those who did not believe that 'the Body and Blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper' as 'in heretical opposition to that Catholic Faith which the Church believes herself to hold'. When the Dean of Ripon Cathedral protested at this, Dodgson senior made a formal complaint against the man to the Bishop. The matter only blew over when the unfortunate Dean was persuaded to apologize.

That Lewis Carroll's father was a man of absolute, unqualified moral certitude cannot be doubted by anyone who reads his work. His was a great intellect petrified by conviction; so alien was the concept of the open mind that for him doubt was akin to failure. He believed that 'the self-same argument that makes toleration a duty makes compromise a sin', and this was evidently the creed by which he lived his life. Well might the Dean complain of Archdeacon Dodgson's 'solemn sentences of excommunication against those who hold different views'.¹²

Photographs show a tall, large-built, virile and imposing man with a head of thick, wavy grey hair that gives him some resemblance to his eldest son in middle age but drawn by a clumsier hand; a weightier version. The qualities of charm and manipulation so evident in his son were manifest, too, but cast here in solid steel. A man like this, armed with the awesome moral ascendancy of absolute conviction, would have been formidable, fascinating, irresistible. He seems to have persuaded many of those who knew him – including most of his offspring – that he was without fault or weakness.

Like most people who have eradicated insight in favour of untempered conviction he was also something of a hypocrite, not above preaching about a charity that he did not see the need to practise himself. He gave advice to other clergymen to live a life of simple religious contemplation. ‘Let him not appear with words of charity and humility on his lips and a spirit of selfish pride reigning within his heart; proclaiming a religion of peace, yet encouraging the distractions and fostering the jealousies of religious party,’ wrote the man who had denounced the Dean of Ripon for his religious tolerance. Presumably he found his justification for this impressive piece of hypocrisy in the reflection that while his opponents in all those disputes were motivated by ‘the jealousies of religious party,’ he was only standing up for the right.¹³ This capacity for sanctimonious double-think was to have a particular impact on his eldest son, who was to find it a fearful object lesson and the first source for his own satirical humour.

The Archdeacon’s conduct towards his children seems to have mirrored his public life. As a father he was, even in the accounts of those who admired him, a controlling man: ‘austere, puritanical and fond of power’; a man with ‘definite opinions’ who did not like his authority challenged.¹⁴ He was a man who wanted to fulfil his duties and was unfailing in his commitment to do so. But, like so many men of his time, he was emotionally distant. In his letters the attempts at expressing affection are awkward and unnatural intervals between more fluent sermonizing. Perhaps significantly, the Archdeacon left behind just one funny letter. Addressed to his eight-year-old eldest son it reads quite strangely – a Carroll-like mind but at quarter-speed; Alice in lead diving boots. Struggling awkwardly to be light-hearted, it

seems to have been written by someone determined to get a laugh but with only a puzzled and rudimentary idea of what a sense of humour might be.

My dearest Charles,

I am very sorry that I had not time to answer your nice little note before. You cannot think how pleased I was to receive something in your handwriting, and you may depend on it I will not forget your commission. As soon as I get to Leeds I shall scream out in the middle of the street, Ironmongers, Ironmongers. Six hundred men will rush out of their shops in a moment – fly, fly, in all directions – ring the bells, call the constables, set the town on fire. I will have a file and a screwdriver, and a ring, and if they are not brought directly, in forty seconds, I will leave nothing but one small cat alive in the town of Leeds, and I shall only leave that, because I am afraid I shall not have time to kill it. Then what a bawling and a tearing of hair there will be! Pigs and babies, camels and butterflies, rolling in the gutter together – old women rushing up the chimneys and cows after them – ducks hiding themselves in coffee-cups, and fat geese trying to squeeze themselves into pencil-cases. At last the Mayor of Leeds will be found in a soup plate covered up with custard, and stuck full of almonds to make him look like a sponge cake that he may escape the dreadful destruction of the town. Oh! where is his wife? She is safe in her own pincushion with a bit of sticking plaster on the top to hide the hump in her back, and all her dear little children, seventy-eight poor little helpless infants crammed into her mouth, and hiding themselves behind her double teeth. Then comes a man hid in a teapot crying and roaring, ‘Oh, I have dropped my donkey. I put it up my nostril, and it has fallen out of the spout of the teapot into an old woman’s thimble and she will squeeze it to death when she puts her thimble on.’

At last they bring the things which I ordered, and then I spare the Town, and send off in fifty waggons, and under the protection of ten thousand soldiers, a file and a screwdriver and a ring as a present to Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, from

His affectionate Papa.¹⁵

It is the ‘Flight of the Bumble Bee’ on an orchestra of tubas; it is a hippo in a ballet tutu, almost touching in its clumsy ineptitude. The Archdeacon was more comfortable with the authoritative aspects of parenting. Most of his surviving letters to his children are dominated by instructions and preaching; well intentioned but weighty. His letter dated 14 October 1856 to his son Skeffington, newly arrived at Oxford to begin his studies, shows a

man who is used to being obeyed and who has little time for the idea that young people of a certain age should be allowed to make their own mistakes.

I shall hope to hear of good Collections, and no scrapes about Chapel or the like – I will thank you to keep an exact account of all that you spend on what we call the first outfit – Glass, China, Hardware &c. as well as gown, Cap & Surplice – Till I have subtracted these from the whole expence, I shall not be able to form any guess as to what your average rate of expences will be – I have commensed two separate books of accts., one for you & one for Wilfred – I particularly beg from the first that your acct. may not be mixed up with Wilfred's (except in such things as Tea & Sugar and other things which you may share together while you are in the same rooms). Whenever you get a cheque on the Bank from Charles for both of you, let the money be divided as required & let each put down his own share in his acct. book *with the date*.

It is to be hoped for their sakes that they remembered to include 'the *date*' in their account books. Dodgson Senior's willingness to exert control over the smallest detail, and even the most intimate areas of his nearly adult children's lives, is illustrated in another letter to Skeffington from only slightly earlier. In this he tells the nineteen-year-old boy, away in Keswick studying for his matriculation examination, to keep away from the local 'young ladies', and he reinforces this advice in a curious and slightly disturbing way.

After confiding that he has sent the boy and his younger brother Wilfred there not just for 'book-work' but 'to see a little of the world on the outside of Croft', he proceeds with an extraordinary set of injunctions 'for your keeping your footing in the society to which you have been thus admitted':

For instance it is necessary to be particularly on your guard with regard to the *young ladies*, into whose company you are introduced – It is perfectly well understood in society that ladies may shew to youths in the position of Private Pupils a sort of kindness and attention which they would not think of shewing if those youths were a little older and more out of the world – This will go on very pleasantly as long as such acts of kindness are received as they are meant, that is, as mere acts of good nature – any attempt to turn them into anything more serious would only have the effect of shutting the door against that Pupil (and perhaps against his fellow Pupils) for the future, and causing much vexation and annoyance on all sides – As I hear of a good many young Ladies in your neighbourhood, I beg of you to be very particular in this respect and never

give any of them reason to expect of any little attentions they may shew you – I know there is nothing that gives greater annoyance to such persons; so you must be careful to avoid it.¹⁶

There is something uncomfortable about this. Although it is couched in terms of the older man advising unworldly youth, it seems to be much more a deliberate manipulation by the father of his sons' adolescent insecurities to frighten them away from supposedly undesirable contact with young women. Did he really believe this restricted (even by Victorian standards) and rather bizarre set of social codes? Or was he using supposed convention as a means of maintaining psychological control? Assuring them that they can only make fools of themselves as well as wreck their careers by responding to any female 'kindness' is certainly an effective way of keeping teenage boys from temptation. Most self-conscious nineteen-year-olds in receipt of this advice would probably become too terrified even to look at a member of the opposite sex, for fear of committing some social gaffe and thus 'shutting the door ... for the future'. But if this was the Archdeacon's usual method of dealing with his children's emergent sexuality it is not surprising that so few of them found the confidence to get lovers and lives of their own.

Whether he intended it or not, the Archdeacon seems to have generated in all of his children – with one significant exception – a kind of hyper-passivity, an over-dependence on him and a want of ambition or purpose. While he remained alive only this one left the family home, and none of them married.

The seven girls looked after their father and did charitable work in the expected Victorian manner. But the boys, of whom much more was traditionally expected, were hardly more adventurous. Wilfred remained only loosely employed and vaguely rootless, although he did escape as far as London, at least for a while. Skeffington, after he finally gained his degree on the third attempt, was employed as his father's curate, and Edwin, the youngest, did not go to university at all. He seemed content to drift on into his twenties without income or career or any detectable life outside the home. The seven girls and their two or three apparently aimless brothers were either happy to remain at home or unable to leave.

But then, within three months of the Archdeacon's death, one of the girls, Mary, had become engaged to her Mr Collingwood and married him the following April. At the same time the apparently aimless Edwin entered the Post Office and later changed his mind and became a missionary; a little later still Wilfred became an estate manager for Lord Boyne and married his long-term love in 1871. Even the least talented of them all, Skeffington, managed to become someone else's curate and eventually found himself a parish and a wife.

In part, this moving away was a response to simple financial necessity. The children had to leave because there was no patriarch to shelter them any more. But this does not answer the question of why so many of them had chosen to remain in this shelter for so long in a prolonged attenuated adolescence.

There is a subtle but effective kind of psychological manipulation, characterized by an exaggerated emphasis on personal failings, a delicate assurance that everything, including the relentless destruction of self-esteem, is being done for the subject's 'own good', that drains the subject of all confidence and volition while making him or her irrationally grateful to the perpetrator; that produces such a vacuum of self-confidence in the subject that the person perceives himself or herself to be the carrier of all blame and iniquity and the perpetrator as somehow blameless, almost sanctified, beyond and above reproach. Almost everything about the Archdeacon's relationship with his children suggests that something of this kind was operating here.

He was revered by his children with an intensity modern analysts would find disturbing. He was a man intolerant of opposition, 'austere, puritanical', with 'decided ideas' for his children's future, who perhaps did not know when to let go. His letters show that he was exercising huge control over their lives even into adulthood and that he was anxious to discourage romantic contact with the opposite sex. Was this a man in a sense dependent on his children's dependence, afraid of relinquishing his place in the centre of their lives and using his considerable charisma to try to ensure that he did not have to? Is this why only after his death did some of them at least begin to live in the full, adult sense? Perhaps this death rescued them from a well-

intentioned tyranny; from the duty never to grow up or move away or find any other centre to their lives.

It would be useful to know whether Mary's suitor appeared on the scene only after the Archdeacon's death or whether he had been there while the old man was alive, hanging around in the background, afraid to declare himself. If so, had there been other intimidated young lovers for other sisters who had been put in their place by Papa or who had given up hope or melted away long before the father died? It is an intriguing and slightly dreadful possibility: Croft Rectory as Henry James's Washington Square.

But the spirit of rebellion sparked in one child at least from a very early age. With extraordinary irony, the man who would be immortalized for his supposed shyness and his abject failure to grow up was the only one of the Archdeacon's children to effect an escape into a fully independent adult life while his father still lived; was to manifest as the least shy of men; was sufficiently self-confident, sufficiently ambitious, sufficiently attractive to overcome the legacy of his childhood and join the wider world – yet, even so, the man who became 'Lewis Carroll' would in the end pay a high price for his freedom. His struggle to separate from this beguiling and domineering father was neither easy nor painless.

The Archdeacon and his eldest son shared elements of personality that would have made them natural rivals, while in other respects their very differences were a source of potential conflict. Both were strong, manipulative and opinionated. But the Archdeacon was a man whose life and work, whose entire philosophy, was founded on the presumed virtue of the slow and steady way, while his eldest son personified impulsiveness and changeability. The Archdeacon was astonishingly clever but without the glamour of brilliance. He had chosen the straight path of modest attainment through the middle ranks of the Church. His life's work embodied the virtues of moderation and application. He was careful, ordered, considered in all things. He had the innate suspicion of the tortoise for the hare, and he tried to instil the same instinct in his children. 'Moderate and regular work is my theory for success,' he wrote; 'few comparatively can be great and brilliant, but all can be industrious.'¹⁷

Perhaps the first difficulty to arise between father and son was the fact that young Charles had been blessed with just this easy brilliance as well as

little natural inclination to be moderate and regular in his work or much else. When Charles won his Studentship from Pusey, his father wrote with what was probably a timely reminder of his own recipe for success. He avowed with unjustifiable optimism that Charles's success proved his own maxim that it was 'the "steady, painstaking, likely-to-do-good" man' who would go furthest in the end and win the race against 'those who now and then give a brilliant flash and then, as Shakespeare says, "straight are cold again"'.¹⁸

However much the older man might try to see it otherwise, it was an unavoidable fact of nature that Charles possessed a mind of exactly this second type; a mind that was, in many important ways, the opposite to his own. It was as much in Charles's impulsive and episodic nature to 'give a brilliant flash' and then be 'cold again' as it was in his father's to be 'steady' and 'likely-to-do-good'. And the young man's academic career continued to make this all too obvious. That Dodgson had a fluctuating capacity for hard work is certainly true. But it was at one with his impulsive and inconstant nature, his easy early scholastic victories, that he had no system of application, that he must veer between intense, almost obsessive periods of work and prolonged and abject laziness.

Study tended to be crammed into the desperate hours before a deadline. In an otherwise flattering and charming obituary, his colleague T.B. Strong described Lewis Carroll's inclination for hard work as 'irregular', with contrasting periods of feverish labour and comparative idleness.¹⁹ This tendency was obviously lifelong but most noticeable and potentially disastrous in his youth. When it came to his degree, he evidently neglected Greats (classics, philosophy and history) and made up for past deficits in his work by three weeks of gargantuan effort in which he studied 'thirteen hours a day' before his examinations, but even so he only managed to scrape a third. He gained a first in mathematics, but after a summer in Whitby writing stories about working-class girls and getting drunk, with no evidence to suggest a large amount of work being done. When he was twenty-three his sloth lost him a vital scholarship that might have been the make or break of his academic career.

He was apt to make ambitious plans for study and draw up immensely complicated reading lists; but his love of life's pleasures, photography,

socializing, day-dreaming, novel-reading and other small indulgences, usually lured him away from his best intentions. His Christian education told him the importance of self-discipline and hard graft, and he tried after a fashion to put these ideals into practice, but they were alien to his strongly developed inclinations towards enjoyment – ‘*Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*.’²⁰

The very traits of his character that were to bring him to genius were also responsible for these personal disasters. His mind was original, urgently creative and easily bored. His early diaries are full of the disparate jottings of a young, frantically curious, hungry intelligence that liked nothing better than to wander as and where and when it chose.

How could his ‘steady’ and ‘likely-to-do-good’ father, this man with ‘definite opinions’, find it in him to approve the wild extremes of triumph and reverse that beset his son’s academic life?

A letter of 1 November 1862 to his younger son Skeffington, who had just won his pass degree at the third attempt, makes it clear that the Archdeacon found it easier to think well of his other, less gifted children, who, while they might not rise so high, at least won their lesser laurels in the way he approved: by slow and steady effort. It also demonstrates that by this time Charles did not enjoy his father’s unmixed good favour. In a very revealing sentence the father confided his belief that ‘the man who is always rowing against a strong stream makes very disheartening progress when compared with him who has wind & tide in his favour – yet he may be, and often is, in reality the better man of the two’. And, in case the allusion was not clear enough, the Archdeacon told Skeffington in the same letter: ‘I feel more proud of your testamur than I should of many another man’s First Class, supposing that man my own son ...’²¹

Skeffington’s hard struggle for his small attainment was, in his father’s eyes, a more worthy achievement than Charles’s more easily won but impressive first. Skeffington, with his dogged persistence, was considered by his father to be ‘the better man’. This is not just a testimony in favour of one brother; it is a statement of reproof of another.

Charles’s mind was fluid, defined by movement; it was mercury while his father’s was granite. The Archdeacon was all substance and solidity; his son was sometimes as fleeting and insubstantial as a dream. His father

considered this most fundamental of his attributes to be a weakness. His sometimes abject laziness was an offence to a man whose life centred on the vital virtue of self-discipline. His sometimes easy academic victories proved the fallacy of the Archdeacon's sacred adage. This young man had it in him to rise higher by his fits and starts than anything his father had ever envisioned. The son was at once a source of pride and a challenge to the father.

Given the father's character, this inevitably led to friction. Of all his eleven children, it was this one, the most gifted and the most rebellious, the most like him and the most determinedly 'independent', who found the courage to look critically at his parent. In the earliest writings of the boy who was to become Lewis Carroll there is preserved the first seeds of the intellectual and moral journey he was to make away from his father's influence. Here we find, as Cohen says, 'Charles smarting under the stern parent's yoke' and using his wit to exact his own kind of revenge.

Written 'about 1845', *Useful and Instructive Poetry*, the earliest of his 'family magazines', is, as the title suggests, a satire on the morally improving literature that was particularly favoured by the evangelical Christians of the time, the kind of tract that probably featured prominently in the Dodgson schoolroom. It is a collection of verse, each one equipped with its own Moral.

'I have a fairy by my side,' Dodgson wrote in one of these:

Which says I must not sleep.
When once in pain I loudly cried
It said 'You must not weep.'
If, full of mirth, I smile and grin,
It says 'You must not laugh';
When once I wished to drink some gin,
It said 'You must not quaff.'
When once a meal I wished to taste,
It said 'You must not bite';
When to the wars I went in haste,
It said 'You must not fight.'
'What may I do?' at length I cried,
Tired of the painful task;

The fairy quietly replied,
And said 'You must not ask.'
Moral : 'You mustn't.'

Another from the same collection is even more direct in its satire of long-winded catechisms of dos and don'ts:

Learn well your grammar,
And never stammer,
Write well and neatly,
And sing most sweetly,
Be enterprising,
Love early rising.
Go walks of six miles,
Have ready quick smiles,
With lightsome laughter
Soft flowing after.
Drink tea, not coffee;
Never eat toffy.
Eat bread with butter.
Once more, don't stutter.
Don't waste your money,
Abstain from honey.
Shut doors behind you
(Don't slam them, mind you).
Drink beer, not porter,
Don't enter the water
Till to swim you are able.
Sit close to the table.
Take care of a candle.
Shut a door by the handle,
Don't push with your shoulder
Until you are older.
Lose not a button.
Refuse cold mutton.
Starve your canaries.
Believe in fairies.
If you are able,

Don't have a stable
With any mangers.
Be rude to strangers.
Moral: Behave.²²

The repeated injunction, 'never stammer' and 'once more, don't stutter', have an obvious autobiographical significance. Was this repetitious and pointless instruction a feature of the Archdeacon's discourse with his eight or nine stammering children? Instructions to 'sit close to the table' and 'shut doors by the handle' were probably part of the children's everyday life, and there is even a hinted joke at parental double-standards in 'don't push with your shoulder, / Until you are older'. Such keenly observed but cheerful impudence characterizes Dodgson's youthful work. If there is the feeling of the snigger behind the hand, this is not surprising. The boy goes about as far into direct satire of the moralizing parental role as might be thought possible without the risk of retribution. It is the writing of a boy who observes human nature keenly and who has already learned the value of satire as a means of indirect challenge.

A later work, a short adventure-ridden Gothic romance called 'Sidney Hamilton', is an eminently silly story about the eponymous hero who leaves the family home after a row with his father over a worthless friend, one Edmund Tracy, whom he refuses to give up. The boy's father pursues the prodigal and eventually thinks he has found him in a wayside inn. He rushes up to embrace the boy who turns out to be not Sidney but the worthless friend. He knocks the old man down, saying, 'I'll tell you what, you old hypocrite ... you'd better not try to come that dodge over me again: I'm not going to have my pockets picked by a sham father', accuses him of trying to rob him and has him arrested. Sidney turns up just in time to interrupt the court case and save his father. Everything is sorted out, the friend is shown up as a scoundrel and father and son are reconciled.

Dodgson has intertwined only slightly encoded autobiography through this silly story: Sidney is the same age as him, about eighteen, and like him has recently left school. Hamilton was the name of the town in which the Archdeacon was born. Amid the derring-do, the fights with highwaymen and other romantic concoctions, Dodgson lets himself explore darker feelings of alienation and resentment. The same confrontation with

authority we find in the early poems is written with a kind of urgency. But why bother with this personalization in a Gothic tale of mistaken identities and ne'er-do-wells?

'It all seems rather pointless,' comments one of the most maverick and perceptive Carrollian scholars, the late Raphael Shaberman, 'until we recognize that Edmund and Sidney are two aspects of the same person. He has split off the rebellious aspect of himself into another personality who can and does violently attack the father with perfect safety.'²³ Shaberman invokes a subconscious psychological rather than a literary purpose in this, but there seems no need to do so. The story was after all destined for the family's private *Rectory Magazine*, where the Archdeacon was almost bound to come across it. A certain amount of disguise would therefore be only prudent. An invented 'bad character' like Edmund Tracy could beat up 'Mr Hamilton' and call him names and generally work off his creator's pent-up feelings without the risk of Papa taking undue offence.

'You old hypocrite,' says the rebellious, hating young man. It is impossible not to recognize how well aimed an arrow this is at the unbending moral certitude of the Archdeacon, who could denounce his fellow churchmen as heretics while condemning the 'jealousies of religious party', who could call compromise a 'sin' while invoking charity as the ultimate duty of the churchman.

When the Freudians suggested Lewis Carroll's father as the prototype authority figure against whom he pitched his anarchic mockery they may have been closer to the truth than their other more bizarre diagnoses perhaps incline one to believe. The preaching fairies and catechisms of petty exhortations to duty of his early work are prototypes of the Duchess in all her grandiose absurdity. In his prime Lewis Carroll reserved his most biting satire for would-be preachers, from Watts to Wordsworth. Hypocrisy personified by the prating and empty moralizer, enemy to human reason and human pleasure, was one of his principal lifelong demons. And a perfect example of it all was to be found at home, leading the family prayers and presiding over family meals, correcting his stammering children with heavily emphasized patience, crushing their independence in the name of teaching them how to behave. His father was his first lesson in the smugness and tyranny inherent in moral ascendancy. What we have here may be the

meaning behind his instinct to rebel, his need for 'independence' and the chance to find his own way, his own certitudes.

At the centre of one half of his internal struggle lay the image and the reality of his father; one of the two most powerful influences on his life. The man who shared his brilliant mathematical mind, who taught him his first understanding of duty and Christian virtue, who remained, in Collingwood's words, for all his son's life the abiding image 'of what a Christian gentleman should be'.²⁴ His own satiric view of authority as hypocrisy was the other half of the sum, the equal and opposite force that acted upon Dodgson and which was by degrees to draw him away from the impressive gravity of the Archdeacon's orbit. It was the other side of the internal debate between duty, as learned from a Christian father, and the dream of freedom that remained a lifelong and ultimately hopeless aspiration.

The text of Dodgson's first surviving diary volume shows that the 23-year-old was already beginning to move beyond those things his father could approve or understand. He still followed most of his father's religious doctrines, avowedly at least, but it is not likely that the Archdeacon would have approved of his *Whitby Gazette* writings about barmaids and drunkenness nor of any real experience that might have underpinned them. More importantly, he had already taken an important step that demonstrated his intention to make his own decisions and live his own life. At some point before January 1855 Dodgson defied an important High Church evangelical dictum and went to the theatre. Why or when he did so we do not know, because the story of that small adventure is lost with his missing journal, but he fell in love with what he found there, and by the time his surviving diary commences his visits to the theatre were a vital and passionate part of his life.

Whenever he was in London he haunted the Princess or the Lyceum theatres, seeing his favourite shows over and over again, luxuriating in the splendour and power of the experience. It was a passion that drew him into the messy epicentre of contemporary society. In the nineteenth century the theatre was like modern movie house and night club together. Middle-class decency had not yet robbed it of its life and meaning. Turnover and attendance were high. It was a social meeting place, a crossing place for

every class of society. In the foyers prostitutes picked up their clients, while in the private boxes royalty and nobility went to be seen more than to see. And the audience got a good return on their ticket money. An evening's entertainment might be four hours long and include one or two supporting programmes as well as the main feature.

Young Dodgson enjoyed being in the thick of all this. Like the hero in his story 'Wilhelm von Schmitz', he fancied himself as a writer and a bit of a man about town. He was writing poetry and trying to get it published. His soul was full of passion for art and beauty. He haunted art galleries and tried never to miss the Royal Academy summer exhibition. Painters were his idols and he would have tried to become one himself if he had not suffered an almost total lack of talent for anything but caricature. As it was he read Ruskin's books and was steeped in the analysis and theory of classical art.

Unlike the routine of term time, his weekends in London almost always merited detailed description in his diary. He would come down from Oxford, stay overnight in one of his favoured hotels or with his uncle Skeffington, go to an art gallery or social gathering, dine out and spend the evening at the 'play'. Sometimes he was alone, sometimes with Oxford or London friends. He was wide-ranging, undiscerning in his tastes. He enjoyed farces and tragedies. His sentimental Victorian soul swelled to a good melodrama. He recorded the names of his favourite actors and actresses together with comments on their performances. Ellen Tree in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* dazzled and astonished him. He was transported into a kind of ecstasy by the impact on his senses: 'I almost held my breath to watch ... and I felt as if in a dream all the time it lasted. It was like a delicious reverie, or the most beautiful poetry. This is the true end and object of acting – to raise the mind above itself, and out of its petty everyday cares – never shall I forget that wonderful evening, that exquisite vision.'²⁵

The experience of hearing the great Jenny Lind sing the *Messiah* moved him hardly less: 'She seemed to abandon herself to the glorious music with a child's delight. Nothing that I can conceive in singing could be more delicious than her high notes, so sweet and low as to [be] more like singing in a dream.'²⁶

In pursuing this intense pleasure he was inevitably beginning to separate from the culture not just of his father but of his most respected peers. Some

of the most influential men in his life – his good friend Henry Liddon, his mentor Pusey – would never have gone with him to a theatre and would have condemned him when he did so. These men, like the Archdeacon, were High Church Tractarians and Ritualists, and such devout almost universally believed that the theatre, along with novel-reading, alcohol consumption and other enjoyable activities, was a path towards evil. ‘I have never been inside a theatre since I took Orders in 1852,’ Liddon wrote in 1879, ‘and I do not mean to go into one, please God, while I live.’²⁷

Cohen alone among a century of biographers has observed the extent to which Dodgson’s willing embracing of the theatre and all it stood for constituted an open defiance and rejection of his father’s philosophy. He is right in saying that Charles’s father ‘could not countenance his opinion or his behaviour’.²⁸ The older man would have seen not the beauty and mystery that his son found but a youth who was too familiar with a hedonistic world where the demi-mondaines swarmed, and he would have feared for his soul. Human nature being what it is, and Charles’s father being the man he was, confrontation of some kind was almost inevitable. It is disingenuous to suggest that because no details of specific disagreements have been preserved they did not take place. Whether words were exchanged between them, or whether there was only terrible and weighty silence, young Dodgson would know he was undertaking activities of which his father could not approve.

This did not stop him. He was determined and ego-driven, and he evidently knew where he wanted to go. The dreary sameness of academic life often bored him: ‘It is thankless uphill work, goading unwilling men to learning they have no taste for.’²⁹ His moments of true happiness came in escaping college life for London where he could indulge in the joys of the theatres and the art galleries, look at pictures, see shows and taste a world of freedom much more to his liking. The sensuousness of his language in describing his theatrical experiences is the first intimation of the very personal inner philosophy: a belief in the divinity of what he called ‘beauty,’ by which he seemed to mean a state of moral or aesthetic or physical perfection.

He found this divine beauty not simply in the magic of theatre but in the poetry of words, in a mathematical formula and, perhaps supremely, in the

human form, in the body images that moved him. When he took up photography he sought with his own representations to combine the ideals of freedom and beauty into the innocence of Eden, where the human body and human contact could be enjoyed without shame. In his middle age, he was to re-form this philosophy into the pursuit of beauty as a state of grace, a means of retrieving lost innocence.

His passionate involvement with the theatre was a first expression of a philosophy that ought to have taken him far away from anything the Archdeacon stood for. In the course of time he would reject almost every important aspect of the High Anglicanism he had been taught. He would spurn the doctrines of eternal damnation. He would profess a tolerance for all expressions of religion, become fervent in his avowal that even atheists would find their place in the heaven of the God he believed in. 'More and more it seems to me,' he wrote in 1886, 'that what a person is is of more importance in God's sight than merely what propositions he affirms or denies.'³⁰ This is a humanism, a compromise the Archdeacon equated with 'sin'. But, this remarkable and courageous social defiance would end for Dodgson in a kind of abortion. There would be, in the end, no triumphant assertion of his own individuality, only scandals and ambiguity – and a failure of nerve.

Dodgson the young man, with his intelligence, his education and his self-confidence, ought to have been able to complete the rebellion he had started. But he never did. He ought to have continued on the path he had set himself. He ought to have ended up in London with the photographic studio he once toyed with renting and been a regular in the salons. He ought, perhaps, to have moved in circles where he would have found the easy-going society he loved, where he would not have had to be either apologetic or defiant about his art; a society that would have found no difficulty in accepting his unconventional friendships with women.

But at a crucial moment something was to go wrong for him. In his late twenties he was to be hit by the sudden and catastrophic loss of confidence that was perhaps the 'shadow' described by his first biographer: the period of depression, desperate guilt, confusion and psychological pain that for ever changed his self-image and would for ever shipwreck his ambitions for a fully 'independent' life. He would become instead the Dodgson of middle

age who alternately baited and placated 'Mrs Grundy', shuttling between his own unconventional beliefs and an insecure need for social approval.

No hint of approaching disaster is detectable in the supremely comfortable 23-year-old diarist in the winter of 1855. His life was poised on the edge of significant turbulence, but as yet he was untroubled. His early photographs show a rather languid, almost Wildean figure, drooping elegantly before his own or his friend Southey's camera, self-consciously trendy in his floppy bow tie, up-to-the-minute baggy coat and just-so curls, almost a fashion-plate of an ideal young man of the mid-1850s. It looks like the photograph of a privileged, worldly inclined youth. He does not look as if he has the slightest inclination to occupy an ivory tower.

His life was a comfortable one of minimal scholastic effort, long vacations and plenty of free time for self-indulgence. His contentment was only occasionally marred by moments of crisis – usually engendered by his own laziness. He enjoyed dining out, college 'wines' and holidays with his friends or his uncle Skeffington, who shared his passion for gadgets and variety and always had new treasures to show off. If he carried a sense of ascendancy, a latent genius and an urgent spirituality inside him, he was also a very typical youth of his class and time, politically Conservative, with his easy assumption of extreme privilege, happy with his chums, his bigotries and his cheerful egocentricity.

At this time his life had a fairly peripheral, if sentimental, place reserved for the child. His lifelong love of informality and unconstrained society drew him to any members of any gathering not hobbled by the awful constraints of Victorian politeness, the rigidities of which he detested. Adults who appreciated his sense of freedom were, inevitably in nineteenth-century middle-class life, few and far between, but when he found them he relished them as lifelong friends. He adored Ellen Terry for her spontaneous and infectious sense of fun. His ideal woman was one who was immune to 'the conventionalisms – or, if you will, the barbarisms – of Society'.³¹

Children were an easily available source of spontaneity and unaffected enjoyment. If the company bored him Dodgson often preferred playing silly games in the garden to the deadly drawing-room banalities of 'swapping small talk with dull people'. This is not about being locked in any kind of attenuated childhood; it is about a young man who wants to escape from an

overdose of stultifying decency and finding in the informality of children the same release he discovered in the theatre. With children that he liked – usually, but by no means always, girls – he dropped instantly into older-brother mode, teasing, joking, telling stories, leading the fun. With five younger sisters and three younger brothers at home this was a familiar and almost automatic role for him to play; an important part of his self-image and an attractive one, because it seems very open and very honest. He befriended Tennyson's young sons in what became a fairly lasting association, bought them penknives and telescopes and re-enacted famous battles with them on the beach.

Beyond that, and much more artificially, he was a self-conscious follower of Blake. He read the *Songs of Innocence*, and, like most of his artistic contemporaries, was already bending the knee in the temple of girl-worship. His sentimental Victorian nature admired some cloying examples of verse on the subject that we can only gag at now. He was able to admire, for example, the following offering by W.C. Bryant:

And then I think of one, who in her youthful beauty died,
The fair meek blossom that grew up and faded by my side.
In the cold moist earth we laid her, when the forests cast the leaf
And we wept that one so lovely should have a life so brief.
Yet not unmeet it was that one, like that young friend of ours,
So gentle and so beautiful, should perish with the flowers.³²

This notwithstanding, if Dodgson had died before he reached the age of forty then the record of his involvement with the child would have been a scant one. In view of the overwhelming legend, it is important to remember that as a young man he entertained no perception of himself as in any way focused on small children.

There is nothing to suggest that he has had any serious love affair by the time his diary begins, although the absence of the first volume means the record is far from complete. The smattering of published work about jokey love affairs with working-class girls that he wrote and published during his Whitby summer the previous year suggests at least interest and quite possibly experience of the opposite sex. But there is nothing to show that his heart has been seriously touched until a single reference to 'first love',

coming after a rash of three consecutive snipped pages in the summer of 1855.³³

When the first surviving volume of his diary commences in January 1855 he is in the midst of one of his most shiftless periods. He was supposed to be studying for the Johnson Scholarship, but he was not in the mood for work and was unable to motivate himself. The first fifteen entries in his diary for this month record weeks of abject laziness spent in novel-reading and general mooching about. 'Failed to start work again' or 'no work done' is his almost daily and rueful record of neglect.

Unsurprisingly, he failed the scholarship. In fact, he did not even bother to complete the examination. He struggled through the first day, but on the second he 'did only two questions in the morning paper, and accordingly gave up'.

He tried to be upbeat about his failure, promising himself that he was 'in very good hopes of getting it next time'. But it was a blow to his confidence and his prospects, and he was in no doubt about the cause. With more knowledge of himself than has been shown by any subsequent biographer, he told his diary that it was entirely due to his own idleness: 'It is tantalizing to think how easily I might have got it, if only I had worked properly during this term, which I fear I must consider as wasted.'³⁴

But he did not learn. His academic career lurched between extreme promise and irresistible distraction. For the 1856 Christ Church Gaudy Dodgson was appointed by the Dean to deliver a lecture on the rather unpromising subject of famous old boy Richard Hakluyt. Given three and a half weeks in which to prepare, and obviously not very enamoured of the task, he dawdled and procrastinated and consistently failed to get round to the job, until with only three days to go he made himself get on with it. He finally got the work finished the night before he had to deliver the lecture.

At the same time, around May or June 1856, there was the annual visitation of Christ Church Library – an inventory to ensure no books were missing. Dodgson as Sub-Librarian was partly responsible for preparing for it. However, he seemed to feel no more sense of urgency about that than about Hakluyt. On 19 May he was in the library when Dean Liddell appeared 'to put books away'. Perhaps noting the fact that no preparation

seemed to be being made yet, Liddell apparently reminded Dodgson that there was, in fact, only a fortnight to go before the visitation.

Dodgson duly noted this in his diary but did not do anything about it. His job as Sub-Librarian was an irresistible temptation for someone with his passion for browsing and his catholic tastes, and inevitably he tended to spend as much time wandering round the shelves looking for interesting reading as doing anything that could be classified as work. The days leading up to the 1856 Gaudy and visitation were no exception.

That week of early summer, with the library to inventory and the life of Hakluyt to write up, he spent his time watching the 'Oxford and Marylebone match', read *Wuthering Heights* and wrote his extensive thoughts about it in his diary. He also borrowed a Royal Academy catalogue and made a little list of all the pictures he wanted to see. On 23 May, with ten days to go until the inventory, Dodgson 'began going over the books in the Library for the Visitation'. It was probably very little to do with his own contribution that on 2 June he could report: 'Library Visitation, no books missing.'³⁵

In due course this inability to drive himself when he did not want to be driven made it hard for him to keep up with the formidable workload of the Mathematical Lectureship, for all his good intentions. Soon after taking up the post at the beginning of 1856 he began to fall behind. The work bored him. He was teaching the sons of the nobility how to do sums and draw triangles. A lot of his pupils were stupid, older than him and richer than him, and almost all of them were uninterested. They did not want to be taught; he did not want to teach them. Mutual apathy ruled.

In addition, his new hobby of photography took up too much of his time, and when he was not photographing anyone and everyone he preferred dining with friends, visiting theatres or reading books on his endless variety of private interests to the dull business of preparing his lectures.

By November that year he was, unsurprisingly, approaching a crisis, way behind with his work and becoming 'daily more unfit' for his job. He confided in a panic-stricken manner to his diary that he was in dire trouble, 'something must be done, and done at once, or I shall break down altogether'. He made stern resolutions to make up for past laziness with relentless hard work and bemoaned the tough schedule he was setting

himself that left no time for 'divinity reading'. But just forty-eight hours later he had forgotten his resolve entirely and was spending a carefree day taking photographs in the Deanery garden, while his mathematical work sat orphaned on his desk and his 'divinity reading' went unread. Like his most famous heroine he generally gave himself very good advice but very seldom followed it – at least for any length of time.³⁶

Dodgson's patchy, incomplete, frequently discursive diaries are the most important, or at least the most extensive, access we have to his life and mind. But they are neither straightforward nor comprehensive documents. From the beginning he seems to have regarded his journal-keeping as primarily an exercise in self-discipline. The regular writing up of the day's events was a duty to be performed. Fortunately for his biographers he was more successful at applying himself here than in the matter of his lectureship or his duties in the library. He was never frantically assiduous; an average of about one day in three was entered up, and there were sometimes quite prolonged lapses of weeks or even months when he recorded little or nothing of his activities. Once begun, however, he kept his record with reasonable regularity until the end of his life, and it is therefore a very valuable document.

But the sense of the diary as duty pervades everything about the way he kept it and the manner in which he recorded events. The humour that was second nature to him in the rest of his life and which floods his extensive correspondence, the unselfconscious enjoyment of fun and informality, is firmly exiled from its pages. It is a document of carefully circumscribed fact, often allusive, dressed in a borrowed dourness, in which embarrassing detail or unmanly emotion are generally eschewed in favour of laconic stoicism. There is an overpowering impression that he is writing for the eyes of an 'other' whom he knows will disapprove of any levity or emotion or faintly purple prose.

It is a Victorian journal, written at a time when a 'manly' man kept his feelings to himself and when, even to the most enlightened mind, some human activities, some areas of experience, some pieces of knowledge were things only to be alluded to, even between yourself and your conscience; particularly when the privacy of your confessional might at any time be

breached by a prying college servant or a curious brother or sister – or even a parent.

He was obviously very aware that this most private document might fall into other hands, and this influenced everything he wrote down. When he called on an actress friend's mother, who also worked in the theatre under a stage name, his awareness that he could not rely on the secrecy of his private confessional made him confide to his diary that he would not write down her real name as she did not want it generally known. This says a great deal about how much privacy he felt he could expect. Perhaps he had experience of being pried on. With ten brothers and sisters and a life in college when doors were rarely locked and servants had automatic entrance, this is not unlikely.

At any rate he learned to contain his most private actions and deepest feelings behind encoded hints and allusions only he would fully understand. And careful analysis shows that whole areas of his experience existed beyond, and unrecorded by, his journal. This provides its own problems for the biographer. The inconvenient 'encoding', combined with the fact that the record is incomplete and has presumably been stripped of precisely those entries and observations that were more than usually revealing, means Dodgson's diary provides as many difficulties and mysteries as enlightenments.

As with everything else in his life there are no absolute rules, and contradictions multiply. The diary was not intended as an open confessional, but occasionally it becomes one. Sudden fleeting moments of feeling erupt when he temporarily forgets his style and says more than he means to say: a moment of lyricism about a piece of poetry, an oblique comment about first love, a spasm of bitterness or resentment, brief and out of place in the anodyne surroundings. Together with his letters and the apparently autobiographical elements in some of his work, this allows us access to the portion of his life beyond the spectrum of direct admissibility. Even within the confines of its most careful circumspection it is possible to read the story of a changing life, unfolding slowly from easy youth through anguished self-knowledge and cynicism to a partially shipwrecked maturity.

The first extant volume is, as we have seen, the untroubled record of a young man enjoying his life. It is an account full of youthful optimism,

innocent of pain or fear. In this regard it makes an interesting comparison with another mid-nineteenth-century Oxford diarist, the poet Arthur Hugh Clough.

Clough matriculated about fourteen years before Dodgson, and obvious parallels can be drawn. Both men were sensitive, creative, deeply intelligent, interested in the religious debates of their day. Both had ambitions to be men of letters. Both kept private journals. Both wrote allusively and tended to litter their accounts with unqualified references to 'first love' or 'Susan's business' that hint at connections and events beyond the scope of the narrative. But other aspects of these personal writings reveal essential and important differences in outlook.

Clough was an anxious young man. Although his diary is properly Victorian in its oblique allusions to all truly personal or sexual matters, a thread of nervous self-awareness is woven through the narrative from the very beginning, an obsessive critique of even his most minor failings. He thought himself guilty of talking too much, socializing too much, having too many opinions and drinking too much wine. Having a fire in his room on a winter evening seemed to him wicked 'luxuriating'. Inevitably in such a conscientious youth his sexual impulses seemed to trouble him. His incipiently homosexual friendship with his tutor gnawed at his mind, and although, of course, he never referred to the matter directly a wordless asterisk together with brief descriptions such as 'due to lying in bed' indicate those days when he succumbed to the temptation of masturbation or the 'calamity' of a nocturnal emission.³⁷

Dodgson at the same age, or only slightly older, presents an entirely different prospect. The relentless Calvinistic self-examination indulged in by Clough and so many other nineteenth-century diarists had no interest for him despite his intensely Christian background. In contrast to Clough's morbid self-absorption, Dodgson's early life exudes a springy, resilient self-confidence and well-grounded refusal to worry about anything too much. He had no urge to do penance for anything. When his own laziness lost him the Johnson scholarship he gave a mental shrug and a few promises to work harder next year. The Archdeacon tried to interest him in life insurance and a sense of responsibility, but they were not for him. His imperturbable certainty that everything would probably turn out all right in the end must

have infuriated his father. He was aware of his faults and tried (haphazardly at least) to improve on them. On New Year's Eve 1856 he reviewed his difficulties in applying himself to his lectureship and frankly admitted that he only worked when it was 'forced on me by my position'. He made a resolution to 'amend myself in those respects in which the past year has exhibited the most grievous shortcomings'. For the first twenty-six years of his life this is the worst thing he found to say about himself.³⁸

If Dodgson had discovered masturbation and wet dreams (and it is hard to imagine that by the age of twenty-three he had not) then the impulses did not appear to disturb him. There are no equivalents to Clough's frantic asterisks, no allusions to undisclosed guilt. His youthful diary manifests a slightly self-centred sense of proportion that is relaxed, easy-going, almost modern. When a man like this begins suddenly at the age of thirty to implore God to raise him from the dust and forgive his unforgivable sin, we had better listen carefully to what he is telling us.

If the course of his existence had remained unchanged for another ten years beyond 1 January 1855 he might have achieved a gradual and guiltless separation from his father and a doctrine and a mode of living in which he could never fully believe.

But the course of his existence did not run unchanged. At around the age of twenty-six something invaded his life, destroyed the vivid self-confidence, the egoism, that had enabled him to find his own way so fearlessly. The something was guilt – the nameless guilt that squats at the centre of this curious life and which we will have to return to again and again, because it seems to be involved in almost every question of what he was and what he became.

After the Verdict: A Summary of the Evidence

There are few nudities so objectionable as the naked truth.

– Agnes Repplier

WE have already seen the curious way in which the myth developed almost independently of the evidence, coexisting with it but only ever dimly or partially aware of it. But what, currently, is the nature of that evidence? What is there from which to build any kind of real picture of the man and his life?

Currently, all the first-hand biographical information about Lewis Carroll is contained within his diaries, his surviving letters, which are quite plentiful but very scattered, with only a very few being published, letters by other people referencing him (which seem remarkably few in number) and various personal documents relating to him and/or his family. None of these sources is complete or untampered with.

At his death in 1898 Lewis Carroll left behind a vast amount of personal documentation. He left a huge collection of photographs – his own and those by other artists. He left books, magazines, manuscripts of his works, copious numbers of letters, as well as a multi-volume register, which recorded every letter he had sent or received over some thirty years. He was an almost compulsive diary-keeper. According to Collingwood, he began keeping a journal at around the age of ten and continued to do so until his death, with only a few years break while he was at Rugby. Approximately fifty-five years of journal-keeping, it was a potential treasure horde for posterity and would have told us more than we would ever want to know about Charles Dodgson, boy, man and compulsive record-keeper. However, today the majority of this documentation is missing. Altogether about 30 per cent of his adult-era diaries (four volumes and seven text pages), around 80 per cent of his letters and other personal papers and again around 80 per

cent of his known photographic portfolio are currently unaccounted for. What remains at the moment is at best a partial record, and there are large areas of Dodgson's life about which we know virtually nothing. In fact, if you have read a standard biography or two, you might be surprised by the paucity of the record on which many of those confidently stated facts can be based. The years of his life before 1855 and between 1858 and 1862 are known only in the very briefest outline as the diaries he kept for those periods are now missing, and his surviving correspondence for the time remains scant or non-existent. In general, his later life is rather better documented, though largely uneventful. But even here there is much that is not known, as, even when the diaries remain intact, Dodgson tended to be quite selective about what he wrote in them. To give one example, he is recorded as being a founder member of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882 and, according to his recently discovered bank account, remained a member until his death, but there is not a single mention of this involvement in his diaries at all.¹

There is still a large but scattered collection of letters to and from Dodgson, as well as collections of his photographs in various locations around the world. One important new discovery, mentioned above, is the details of Dodgson's personal bank account which, unlike almost everything else, has not been mutilated or edited and therefore does offer, in a limited way, some new insights into the man. But since so little of the remaining data is complete, it cannot provide a complete picture. Indeed, it is quite possible that the evidential record has been deliberately edited in order to remove what may have been deemed inappropriate or too personal material, and this possibility entails even more caution in how we evaluate what remains.

Where did so much of the evidence go?

As already mentioned, an unspecifiably large amount was burned very soon after Carroll's death by the executor of his estate, his younger brother Wilfred Dodgson. Exactly how much he destroyed at this time we cannot be sure, but on 10 February 1898 – a little less than a month after Carroll's death – Wilfred wrote to Brooks the auctioneer, of Magdalen Road, Oxford, asking him to have some 'sacks' of papers burned, and the suggestion is of a considerable amount.² There is also a persistent story within the family that

Dodgson requested his executors to destroy everything he left behind of a 'personal or private nature', but this has never been verified. However, the entire diary and the letter register, and what Stuart Collingwood described as 'thousands' of letters received as well as some copies of those sent, all survived the initial purge. In the summer of 1898 this material was still extant, and Collingwood used a certain amount of it while he was writing his 'official' life of Lewis Carroll.³

What happened to it after that is unclear. All that we know for sure is that at some time after Collingwood wrote his biography in 1898 the bulk of this documentation somehow went missing, while someone cut several pages from the diaries and crossed out or otherwise mutilated some others. For many years the extent of this loss and destruction was concealed by the fact that the Dodgson family simply refused to allow any researchers access to the Carroll papers, and the full extent is still difficult to determine. Because so much was sold without proper record, and because there is still no comprehensive record of how many letters or photographs or other papers survive in private collections, we can not yet say exactly how much remains, let alone how much was lost.

The favoured public explanation given by the Dodgson family for the loss of the material is that it was simply and regrettably mislaid somewhere, although no one seemed very clear about when or by whom, and different versions tended to crop up. The first of these seems to have been given to the author Helmut Gernsheim in about 1949. The story at this time was that the diaries had been lost while 'the Dodgson nieces' (Carroll's nieces Violet and Menella) had been moving house to Leamington Spa during the Second World War.⁴ Another slightly different take on the same theme was offered by the family when the edited version of the diaries finally appeared in print in 1953. This time it was claimed that the missing volumes had mysteriously vanished from a cardboard box while being stored in a cellar.⁵ We have reason to be fairly sceptical about this.

One of the most immediately obvious things when one looks closely at the location of the majority of the cut pages is the fact that they cluster very closely around the same period covered by the supposedly 'lost' diary volumes. All but one of the seven cut text pages occur between the years 1855 and 1863, and all four of the 'lost' volumes fall between almost exactly

the same period, 1853 and 1862. Thus, with the exception of one page, all the missing diary material occurs in a single eleven-year period of Carroll's life.

On the face of it, this does not seem very much like pure accident or indeed the arbitrary and disconnected editing of touchy relatives with oversensitive feelings and no particular agenda. The mutilators of the record seem to have confined their attentions to one relatively small area of Dodgson's life, and this implies conscious and directed motive. Interestingly, this is also the period in which Dodgson was clearly deeply troubled, full of a sense of guilt and in the throes of abandoning his earlier intention to become a priest. It closely coincides with the time from 1858 to 1868 in which he produced the only love poetry he is known to have written. All this implies potential motive in his family for suppressing and controlling access to the data, and we shall examine these potentials in the next chapter. Here we shall consider simply the possible perpetrators of the 'crime'.

Can we determine what happened to the missing material? When was it last seen? Who had possession of it before it vanished?

First we need to be aware that Dodgson himself definitely did cut a number of pages out of his own diaries. However, most of these seem to have been cut while still blank; there is nothing to show any pages of text were removed by Dodgson himself, although it remains possible that some were. But after his death and the various burnings and auctions initiated by Wilfred had broken up much of the collection a core of Carroll's most personal papers still remained in the Dodgson family's hands. This included his letter register, 'thousands' of letters and – crucially – all the numerous volumes of his private diary.

Most of this archive seems to have been given or loaned almost immediately, in the spring of 1898, to Stuart Dodgson Collingwood, Carroll's 28-year-old nephew, who had been appointed his official biographer by the family. As we have seen, Collingwood's biography made little use of this rich source of material; however, it did quote from all four of the now missing adult diary volumes – thus putting it beyond doubt that they were still extant and in Collingwood's possession at the time of his writing. Indeed, in an interview he gave at the time of writing he specifically

mentions the fact that he has all of Dodgson's diaries – including his youthful journals – in his care.⁶

Collingwood finished writing his biography of Carroll in the summer of 1898, and the papers seem to have been returned to Wilfred. After Wilfred died they were looked after by his surviving sisters, and when the last of these died in 1930 the 'Carroll archive' became the responsibility of Wilfred's children: his eldest son Charles Hassard Wilfred and his two daughters Menella and Violet. After Charles Hassard's death in 1941 the two women managed the estate alone until they died, Menella in 1963 and Violet three years later, by which time the four diary volumes and the seven cut pages had already vanished.

So, somewhere and at some time between 1898, when Collingwood used the diaries for his biography, and 1969 when the remaining volumes were sold to the public, someone had done something fairly drastic to them.

There is, apparently, a persistent rumour within the family that Stuart Collingwood deliberately destroyed part of the diary while it was in his possession to protect the family reputation. This is highly possible. He was, it seems, well aware of the literary and historical importance of the material, and, as we have seen, something he wrote in his biography of his uncle makes it clear that he did not make public all he had found there.

The fact that Collingwood admitted to believing there were aspects of his uncle's life ('dead sanctities') that ought never to be made public adds support to the family rumour that it was he who destroyed at least some of the now missing material, particularly given the fact that two of the four missing volumes and one of the missing pages covers the precise period when the love poems Collingwood refers to were being written. Thus it seems quite plausible that Collingwood's determination not to 'lift the veil' may have gone beyond mere reticence and involved actual destruction of material that revealed something of the 'dead sanctities' he was anxious to keep private.

The possibility that it was Collingwood who was responsible for removing some material seems further supported by a letter he wrote to his cousin Menella in 1932, in answer to some inquiries she had sent him. From his replies it is possible to divine the questions Menella is asking and, crucially, one of them appears to concern the whereabouts of the missing

diary volumes. Menella seems to be genuinely searching for information, which implies that neither she nor her sister Violet or brother C.H.W. have any idea of what has happened to them and almost certainly can't be implicated in getting rid of them. Even more suggestively, Collingwood replies to her inquiry with a lie. In response to her question about the missing diary volumes he says: 'I don't think I ever had the *complete* diary.'⁷

This was, of course, completely untrue. Collingwood had very definitely had the 'complete diary'. So we are left wondering why he felt the need to lie about this to his cousin Menella. Was his cover-up so sensitive that he could not even own up to it to his own family?

Can we assume, from circumstantial evidence like this, that Stuart Collingwood was the person who mutilated Dodgson's diaries? Such an explanation has the appeal of simplicity, but the facts do not seem to support such a straightforward interpretation. In fact the balance of the evidence seems to point unequivocally to the existence of at least two quite separate perpetrators.

Crucially for the unravelling of this puzzle, the stumps of the missing pages indicate two very different methods of cutting. The majority of the pages – five out of seven – have all been cut with ruler-straight precision, as if someone had used a cut-throat razor or craft knife. In contrast, the other two stumps are jagged and ragged and seem to have been snipped ineptly with short-bladed nail scissors pretty inadequate to the task.

The discovery of the bizarre 'cut pages in diary' document has allowed even further light to be shed on this. This document seems to have been written out by Lewis Carroll's niece Violet Dodgson with additions by Menella (and indeed later ones by Philip Dodgson Jaques), around the time of the centenary of his birth in 1932. It contains a summary of the contents of two of the now missing pages, together with a summary of a third page that was not cut out but heavily inked over. The summaries were apparently written just before the pages were removed, and the implication is that since Violet and Menella wrote the summaries they also cut out the two pages. Most interestingly, the two pages concerned here are also the two that are cut differently from the other five.⁸

The implication is therefore that the two jagged-cut missing pages were done by Violet and Menella.

The strange antics and frantic secrecy of these two ladies are touched on elsewhere. More than anyone else they can be associated with the deliberate manipulation of the Carroll image through suppression and misinformation. It was Menella who wrote in 1932 that she was permitting Langford Reed to leave 'as ignorant as he came'⁹ and Menella who gently obstructed inquiries from Florence Becker Lennon and Alexander Taylor, pretending information was not available or hard to find when we now know it was quite readily to hand. It was Violet and Menella who supervised the first publication of Dodgson's private diary, refused to permit the editor, Roger Lancelyn Green, even to see the MS originals and seem to have frankly lied to him about the content they would not let him see. The possibility that they went so far as to excise some of the information they patently regarded as being so very sensitive seems entirely consistent with their avowed *modus operandi*, and indeed, as we saw earlier, Menella openly admitted removing certain pages and keeping them hidden somewhere.

The prolonged absence of so much data had its own impact on the development of the myth, but beyond that the overwhelming question seems to be – *why?* What was the motive for the wild secrecy, the avoidances, the lies and the mutilations of text?

The usual explanation is that the Dodgsons were simply over-sensitive, perhaps slightly nutty, highly religious people, obsessively and chaotically preserving their famous relative's privacy, frantically deleting even the most glancingly personal material or simply hacking the text randomly as impulse of some passing sense of queasiness dictated. And to an extent this has to be acknowledged as true. There are elisions and excisions of material from the Green edition of the diaries that seem entirely inexplicable in rational terms and certainly seem consistent with a couple of elderly ladies randomly blue-pencilling stuff, perhaps after one sherry too many. Violet and Menella do seem to have been almost insanely secretive, almost as a reflex, even when one gets the impression they had only a sketchy idea of what they were being secretive about.

But this should not blind us to a deeper reality. Beyond their random excesses there is the earlier intervention of Collingwood and the simple fact that 99 per cent of the missing material is located within that one single fractured and mysterious decade of Dodgson's life. A time of pain and guilt

and religious doubt – and love poetry. This is clearly food for thought. It implies that there was an incident or perhaps a plurality of incidents during this period that were the targets for concealment by Carroll's family. What these incidents were we do not presently know, and it is likely we will never be able to be certain, but there are obvious implications we cannot ignore. We probably cannot afford to assume – as so many earlier writers have done – that these things are all unconnected with each other and simply look no further. Someone seems to have attempted to erase a significant chunk of something from the record at a time of known difficulty in Carroll's life. It becomes the work of posterity to try to put it back if possible, or at very least to draw attention to the lacunae.

But in the current position of the Carroll biography this has presented its own problems. It requires an acknowledgement that Carroll's life may have been deep, complex, even secretive, and, above all else, adult. It requires an acknowledgement that Carroll may – only may – have been embroiled in actions or ideas that could not be acknowledged by his 'respectable' family. These things are anathema to the very essence of what Carroll has been assumed as an article of faith to be, and assimilation requires a shift of perspective that is not easy for anyone to accomplish. So, there is a curious psychological duality operating over this issue, with some biographers and writers being driven to make increasingly extreme and rather irrational rationales for continuing to disregard or gloss over the question of the missing material while still preserving their self-image as serious investigators.

We need to try to do better than that.

‘Mistery of Pain’

Liddell lokker through the leafery, ours is mistery of pain.

– James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

The spells that bound me with a chain
Sin’s stern behest to do
Till Pleasure’s self, invoked in vain,
A heavy burden grew –

– Lewis Carroll, ‘The Valley of the Shadow of Death’

THE two consecutive volumes of Dodgson’s diaries for the years 1858 to 9 May 1862 are missing, presumed destroyed by Collingwood. It is clear they cover some period of unexplained change in the man’s life and inner landscape. The last entries of Volume 3 show Dodgson still very much in his usual state of mind and appearing pretty relaxed about himself and his universe. But when his diary voice returns on the other side of the four-year lacuna something has changed. The general narrative is even more clipped, more tight-lipped, more allusive than ever, and it is interspersed, for the first time, with elliptic painful references to his own sin. On 17 May 1862, just eight days into the new volume, the first of these appears. ‘Oh God,’ he appealed in an apparently spontaneous outburst, ‘help me to live a better and more earnest life.’

This is something entirely new. As we have seen, Dodgson’s youthful episodes of self-analysis tended to be confined to New Year’s Eve resolutions to work harder. Otherwise, God’s judgement and his own frailty seemed to worry him rarely, if at all. But over the four absent years something changed, made him anxious and depressed, and he could not keep his agitation from spilling out into his diary. The same beseeching request to God for help appears again on 12 June, in almost identical wording, together with an

expressed intention to get 'some Sunday duty in Oxford next term'. As spring becomes summer, as the 'golden afternoon' that saw the birth of *Alice* comes and goes with scarcely a mention, his disquiet only increases. He is sick of Oxford and his work, longs to 'get away and begin perhaps a system of better habits & a holier life'.

The malaise and unhappiness continue throughout July, and there is no explanation or expansion and nothing in the immediate context of the surrounding material to shed any light on what it means. Not until 24 July is there anything to give even the slightest hint at what lies behind this new fractured and depressive personality. On that day he wrote more volubly and at greater length than usual:

I have been at work at examination papers most of this week, & have put off going to Streatley, where I was to have preached next Sunday. I have also been asked by Hackman & by Chamberlain to preach for them: till I can rule myself better, preaching is but a solemn mockery – 'Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?' God grant this may be the last such entry I may have to make! that so I may not, when I have preached to others, be 'myself a cast-away'.¹

The quotations he uses give at least some insight into the type of demon that is haunting him. 'Myself a castaway' is a reference to I Corinthians 9:27, an essay on the double standards of the supposed anointed who preach the word of God but do not follow it in their actions. It is his old bugbear, hypocrisy, plaguing him in a new way. He honestly confides that his own attempts at preaching must inevitably be touched with such hypocrisy, that they must be a 'solemn mockery' until he can 'rule himself better'. He evidently sees himself as out of control and out of God's grace in a way he never has before, and this impression is reinforced repeatedly and with ever-increasing intensity over the following five or six years.

Sometimes this inner pain manifests as a single terse line of bitter self-reproach; sometimes there is an outpouring of agony taking up half a page or more. As time goes on the self-revelatory nature increases to a degree; he frankly confesses to 'sin' and by allusive Bible references gives some shape to what that sin might be. He perceives himself as cast out, a 'wandering sheep', alternately imploring God for help in resisting temptation and condemning

himself for his inability to do so. He feels powerless, unable to find the will to break free from the 'chains of sin'.

He repeatedly invokes the same handful of quotations from the Bible – quotations that evidently had deeply personal meaning for him: Mark 14:38 and Matthew 26:41 in their essays on temptation, 'Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak'; Psalm 39, v. 12, 'O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more'; Hebrews 9:14, 'purge your conscience of dead works to serve the living God'; and, most frequently of all, Psalm 51, David's hymn of repentance after his adultery with Bathsheba, 'make me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a right spirit within me'.

At his most desperate moments he forgets the restraint of his diary voice and allows his feelings to guide his hand. He refers to his 'corrupt affections' and the 'inclinations of my own sinful heart'. Scrawling across the page fast and frantic, some of these most desperate appeals are as beautiful as they are revelatory of his pain. 'Too long, too long I have lived away from God,' he writes on 5 June 1866: 'Gracious Lord, send Thy Holy Spirit to dwell in this sinful heart – to purify this corrupt affection – to warm into life this cold love for thee.'

One month later, another begins:

My heart is very heavy. I resolve and pray, but seem to beat the air. Oh God, who hast given me the will to pray, give also Thy Holy Spirit to cleanse & sanctify me, for Jesu Christ's sake, Amen. Oh how blessed would be my future life if from this night of heaviness & sorrow for sin I could begin anew, striving more & more to return unto the Lord, that He may have mercy & abundantly pardon my sin!²

This is most evidently a man in an extreme of psychological suffering; deeply depressed and sometimes despairing. For four years, between the spring of 1862 and the summer of 1866, he continues in the same vein, an ebb and flow of a tormenting 'sin' he never identifies. While *Alice* was written and published, while his career as a photographer progressed ever upwards, while he mixed in the London artistic bohemian society he craved and while he began to find the fame he had always wanted, instead of joy in his heart there was darkness. He was not fulfilled; he was not often happy.

He was restless, changeable. His work veered from passionate love verse to the mocking cynicism of 'Miss Jones' and the darkest sections of *Alice*. He saw himself living away from God, losing his faith and sinning, repeatedly sinning and unable to make himself stop. In his diary he thinks himself a hypocrite when he preaches and describes his efforts more than once as 'a solemn mockery'. The dread of becoming a 'castaway' never leaves him, and repeatedly he implores his God for forgiveness, for help in finding his way back from the darkness into the light. For the first time in his life he begins to carp at himself for little misdemeanours: 'My habits of life need much amendment, and I am grievously neglecting means of grace',³ as his self-loathing spills out to encompass everything about himself like a fat woman in front of a mirror. He seemed unable to forgive himself anything any more.

The contrast could not be more marked. The easy-going young Dodgson, who shrugged off most of life's mischances, has given way to a man in the grip of torment. At a time when life should have been at its best he found himself instead grovelling in 'the dust' and unable to rise. He sees himself trapped in an unbreakable cycle of temptation, yielding, consequent self-loathing and short-lived promises to reform giving way to temptation and yielding again.

This emotional turmoil is mirrored in his increasing difficulties over his entry into the priesthood. Like every Student nominated before the 1858 ordinance he was obliged by the statutes to take holy orders 'within four years of becoming MA' or to vacate his Studentship. It is possible, maybe even probable, that he had never been entirely convinced of his vocation. His embracing of the theatre was an open statement of intent to find his own morality outside his father's dogmatic High Anglicanism; in his full maturity he would develop a faith more akin to Swedenborg than Newman, and the sense of questing and uncertainty must have made him wonder if he could fully mean the promises that he would be required to make. We know he was pursuing the teachings of F.D. Maurice, whose views were considered dangerous, even heretical, by many mainstream Episcopalians. He is said to have had doubts about the Thirty-Nine Articles and later in his life was even flirting with the ideas of Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophists.

Previously his doubts had, presumably, always been nebulous enough for him to believe that when the time came he would be able to do what was

expected of him. After all, the priesthood had been his father's ambition for him, probably since birth, and when Canon Pusey had used his personal patronage to nominate him for a Studentship in 1852 he had done so on the express understanding that the young nominee would proceed to full holy orders. Dodgson had promised Pusey faithfully that this was his intention. There was, therefore, tremendous emotional and moral pressure on him to take this step. He began reading for ordination in 1857, although only haphazardly.

Coincident with the missing diary volumes, this initial determination evaporated. One of the last entries in his diary before the four-year gap, that of 31 December 1857, records, along with his expressed intention to study for taking his vows 'at the end of the year' (that is, 1858), the need for 'settling the idea finally and definitely in my mind'.⁴ He was unsure of his commitment, and over the next four years his uncertainties only increased. He did not, as he had projected, take his vows at the end of 1858, nor did he do so the following year, nor the year after that. By this time his doctrinal uncertainty had been further complicated by his growing sense of personal sin, and there begins to be a sense of an existence tipping over into chaos. His family letters are flippant and outwardly cheerful, but his internal difficulties were biting.

If he refused to take his vows he would be breaking his solemn word to one of his father's oldest friends. He would also have to forfeit his Studentship and with it his only source of income – the Mathematical Lectureship. He would be ejected from the comfortable womb of Christ Church patronage, bereft of his cherished financial independence, forced perhaps to rely on the mercy of the father whose faith he might be seen to be rejecting and who was not known for his tolerance of differing religious views. But how could he, with his intense honesty, possibly take a vow in which he did not have absolute belief? His inability to resolve this internal dilemma put him on a course towards confrontation with his college and indeed the entire way of life in which he was supposed to believe.

By the beginning of 1861 a crisis was looming. If he was to conform to expectation and become a priest within four years of his MA then he would have to take his vows that winter or face the consequences. Stuck between a rock and a hard place, between the option of losing his income and

independence or taking vows that he felt he could not, for whatever reason, honour, he tried with all his mental dexterity and ingenuity to find a bolt hole, a good reason for finding himself debarred from the priesthood, some means of avoiding his vows but keeping his job, his income and the freedom it brought him.

We learn from a later letter that at around this time he went to see the Bishop of Oxford and confided to the probably bemused 'Soapy Sam' Wilberforce that he thought his profession of mathematics might be 'unfit occupation for a clergyman' and that he might have a 'sort of duty' not to take holy orders. Even if Dodgson's own sainted father had not been both a clergyman and a teacher of, among other things, mathematics at Croft School, it would be hard to believe that he expected anyone to see this as a serious objection, let alone that he saw it as such himself. Victorian academia was, after all, still largely in the grip of the medieval custom; almost all scholars were also churchmen, and so it had been since civilization began. He does not say so, but it was most evidently an excuse and a pretty hopeless one; a slightly desperate man clutching at imaginary straws.

Unsurprisingly, the Bishop merely assured him that he need have no worries on the score of reconciling God and maths and that 'so far from educational work (even Mathematics) being unfit occupation for a clergyman, it was distinctly a good thing that many of our educators should be men in Holy Orders'. Dodgson was forced to think again.

His next move, so he tells us, was to approach his friend, the devout Henry Liddon, the prodigy of piety considered a near-saint by his fellow Anglo-Catholics. With this younger and less authoritative man he was more frank. He confessed that he simply did not know if he felt able to commit to the priesthood:

I could not feel sure that I would ever wish to take Priest's Orders. And I asked Dr Liddon if he thought I might be justified in taking Deacon's Orders as a sort of experiment, which would enable me to try how the occupations of a clergyman suited me, and then decide whether I would take full Orders.

Fortunately for Dodgson Liddon proved a more amenable confidant, or at least Dodgson chose to interpret his advice in a more amenable way: 'He

said, “most certainly” – and that a Deacon is in a totally different position from a Priest: and much more free to regard himself as practically a layman.’⁵

The cosmetic gloss of a deacon as ‘practically a layman’ is much more Dodgson than Liddon, whose exacting standards of religion and personal conduct – he regarded the theatre as lying ‘in the direction of sin’ and advocated voluntary celibacy for the clergy – would be unlikely to extend to such latitude. It is revealing of the state of mind in which Charles Dodgson entered the Church: nervous, reluctant, striving to make a fudge of his conscience. We can almost hear him reasoning that if a deacon were ‘practically a layman’ then even a doubter and sinner such as he might become one without too much blatant hypocrisy. In his heart he probably knew he had no vocation.

Whether as a result of this conversation, or out of sheer inability to find any reason for putting it off any longer, at the eleventh hour, on 22 December 1861, four years and ten months after taking his MA, Dodgson managed to reconcile his doubts and his conscience enough to put one foot into the priesthood and take his deacon’s vows in Christ Church Cathedral. Only a few weeks before he had published a poem about a man torn with longing for a woman he cannot have. A few months later the newly sworn cleric was confessing his own wickedness and sin in his poetry and in his prayers. ‘The man,’ as Cohen observed, ‘is in trouble.’⁶

His taking of deacon’s orders could be no more than a temporary respite to his problem. He was required by the statutes of his college to proceed to full priest’s orders within twelve months or forfeit his right to remain at Christ Church, and he was still as bound as ever by his promise to Pusey to become a priest. But, having taken deacon’s orders and thought it a solemn mockery to have done so, he would not, perhaps could not, compromise further. Something, perhaps the awful possibility of himself in a surplice playing a splendid sanctimony – preaching to others while he was himself a ‘castaway’ – would not let him proceed with the only course of action compatible with statute and with honour.

By this time, the autumn of 1862, his state of mind was anything but stable: ‘Oh God, help me for Christ’s sake,’ he wrote more than once. His inner chaos is exemplified by his complete inability to remain with one point

of view for more than a few hours or days. On 17 October 1862 he told his diary: 'I must try and get into regular habits, and a life of more direct preparation for the Ministry.'⁷

Only four days later, however, he had entirely changed his mind and abandoned all possibility of becoming a priest. Again the impossible choice presented itself; to take vows of which he could not think himself worthy or to abandon his Studentship and his only source of income. Again he sought a bolt hole for his conscience. Apparently on an impulse, he went across Tom Quad to see Dean Liddell, whose family were so much a part of his life, and ask for permission to be excused from taking his priestly vows.

The details of their meeting and the implications of Dean Liddell's decision will be dealt with later. Suffice it to say for now that having reflected on the situation, the Dean chose, in complete defiance of the House's newly minted Statutes, to exempt Dodgson from the requirement to proceed to full orders. For the rest of his life he was to remain at Christ Church in this anomalous and strictly illegal position, halfway into Holy Orders without ever taking the final step, neither priest nor layman.

His decision to abandon the priesthood must have come as a grievous shock to those closest to him. In later life he managed to persuade himself that his mentor, Canon Pusey, would have understood. 'I am quite sure,' he wrote in a later letter, 'if I had told him, when the time came to be ordained, that I had changed my mind, he would not have regarded it as in any way a breach of contract.'⁸ In fact it was exceedingly unlikely that Pusey would not have minded, because a 'breach of contract' was exactly what it was, and Pusey, with his passion for winning young men into the sanctuary of holy orders, would probably have described it as a betrayal of trust as well. That Dodgson, in his deepest heart, knew this is suggested by the fact that, although he told himself that Pusey would not have minded, he at no stage made any attempt to ask the man directly.

And what about his father? When he relinquished the priesthood he was, more overtly than ever before, rejecting the life his father had wanted and expected for him. The Archdeacon was not the man to take such a challenge to his authority meekly. It must have been as much a crisis in their relationship as it was a crisis of his son's psychology. But little evidence now remains. If they exchanged letters the letters have disappeared, but one small

fragment is still in the family correspondence to illustrate that the oldest son was not in high approval at the end of 1862. As we have seen, at that time his younger brother Skeffington had just, laboriously, won his pass degree at the third attempt, and his father's letter of proud congratulation is couched in significant words: 'I feel more proud of your testamur than I should of many another man's First Class, supposing that man my own son ...'⁹

The wording may simply be intended to encourage a young man who was sick of feeling inferior to his effortlessly bright older brother, but when we consider that it was written in November 1862, just weeks after Dodgson's interview with Liddell and at a time when his father would have had such good reason to think rather bitterly of him and his failed promise, the letter can be read as an oblique and gentlemanly condemnation, a statement that, for all the oldest son's flashy cleverness, Skeffington, who had not betrayed the priesthood and let his father down, was 'the better man of the two'.

We can infer there must have been confrontations of some kind between father and son as a result of Charles's decision, and we can assume the impact on the relationship between father and son was considerable and long-lasting. But we can do no more than infer or assume, because Dodgson's diary voice is entirely silent on the subject of his father's reaction. Nor do we have any surviving correspondence on the subject.

Meanwhile, and over the next few years, while his career as artist and photographer continued to blossom, while *Alice* was readied for publication and he enjoyed summers in London society, Dodgson's depression and internal disarray worsened. In the summer of 1866 he entered his darkest time. His self-esteem and his sense of himself as a religious being were in shreds. He longed for mental peace, to be able to take communion 'with real resolve of amendment in life' and begged forgiveness for his 'miserable past'. He met a clergyman whose parish was among 'artisans', and the man's simple goodness made him think how 'sadly unfit' he himself was for such work. 'Oh God,' he begged helplessly, 'make me a clean heart.'

The next day was even worse. Almost a whole page was given over to his engulfing wretchedness. He felt the uselessness of his own prayers. He was in darkness and implored the Holy Spirit to 'cleanse and sanctify' him. He seemed in total despair.¹⁰

But then, between 10 and 22 July, something happened to renew a sense of hope in him. He makes no admission of what it was, how it came about or exactly when, but for Dodgson it evidently felt like a helping hand stretched out to him, and he clutched at it with gratitude.

‘I thank God for grace and strength given me,’ he writes on the 22nd. He had known these moments of hope before, but they had always been rapidly extinguished in a fresh outburst of self-loathing. But this time the cautious optimism remains with hardly a waver as the months go by. Whatever it was that had brought his renewed strength did not desert him. His prayers become marked less by guilt and self-disgust and more by an awareness of past misdeeds and a fear of succumbing again to their lure. He reminds himself repeatedly of the need to ‘watch and pray’, tells himself that ‘self-discipline must be my chief work for a long while to come’. He must ‘learn to bring his rebellious will into subjection to the will of God’.¹¹

For the next few months he seems to be like a man recovering from a terrible and mortal illness, hardly daring to believe in his own returning health, dreading every moment to lose it again but slowly learning to trust the body that has so betrayed him. His illness was not of the body but of the spirit, yet it is evident that it came near to destroying him. The fear of sinning again continued to haunt him through the next year or two, and he begged more than once for forgiveness for his ‘past sins’. But gradually the old pain began to fade. His sense of the need for constant vigilance abated. By the end of the decade all anxiety, guilt and pain have virtually vanished from his diary. For a year or two there is the occasional rather formulaic reminder to ‘watch and pray’, but soon these, too, disappear. The dark night of his soul is over.

The record of Dodgson’s struggle with sin and despair is a well-defined and progressive story of some kind of event, some kind of experience with a beginning that is most probably rooted in the period of the missing diaries and an end (or at least the beginning of an end) in the summer of 1866. What did it mean to him?

Such are the conditions prevailing in Carroll scholarship that this has only recently been recognized as a significant question. The long suppression of the most relevant material meant that the first sixty years of biography were constructed without any awareness that this pivotal event in

Dodgson's life had even happened. The first scholar to be allowed to see anything at all of this most private material, Roger Lancelyn Green, did not do so until the early 1950s, and, as we have seen, decided to use his preface to the edited *Diaries* (1953) as a platform to dismiss Dodgson's 'pious ejaculations' as a product of a hypersensitivity to his own small failings and thus to be biographically insignificant. All the evidence for this turbulent time was left out of the Green-edited published diaries, and on Menella's behalf Green endeavoured to persuade the reading public that the sins confessed in the unpublished portions were 'entirely those of wasted time, wasted opportunities for doing good ... and self-condemnation of personal failings ... the worst of which seems to have been his tendency to sleep, or at least idle away, some hours after the early (and rather heavy) College dinner'.¹² This was, of course, a well-intentioned piece of disinformation: the image of Carroll that Menella wanted to present. But because it also represented the image of the myth, in its hint of unrelenting asceticism, and because for so long no one but Green and the Dodgsons knew anything about the true nature of Dodgson's 'pious ejaculations', the disinformation remained current for some time.

Not until the mid- to late 1990s did any writer begin to consider this episode with any seriousness or recognize the obviously sexual nature of Dodgson's 'sin'. Bakewell and Cohen were, to their credit, the first writers to refuse to be palmed off with the cosy notions of large suppers and over-sensitive consciences. They perceived, in Cohen's words, that 'the facts argue for more'. They recognized the depth of emotion involved, the inevitably sexual implications. However, the conclusions they drew were influenced more by their preconceptions about the man than by anything available in the evidence. 'The nights brought troubled thoughts for which he saw himself a miscreant' was how Cohen delicately phrased his interpretation of Dodgson's pain. Bakewell was more earthy: 'The most obvious explanation is that this is a record of his failure to overcome the Victorian demon of masturbation'.¹³

While they do represent an undoubted forward step in the understanding of this most secret and turbulent period in Dodgson's history, these constructions of Dodgson as the victim of masturbation or uncontrollable wet dreams are in their way as much the result of the implicit

assumptions of the myth as the cosy image of heavy college dinners and over-sensitive consciences. Their contention that his guilt centred on 'sexual dreams' or masturbation draws inspiration from the mythic images of his chastity, his isolation and his rejection of adult sexuality. It is, in fact, a reaffirmation of his quasi-religious symbolism, the myth of his unassailable 'otherness'. His sexual guilt has to be commensurate with his virginity. Masturbation and nocturnal emissions are the only sexual 'sins' reconcilable with Carroll's monkish iconism. Bakewell's 'most obvious explanation' is only that because all others are ruled as impossible by the fact of Carroll being Carroll. The exigencies of the myth make it imperative that this is where we find the answer, even if it is incomplete and partial, even if better explanations present themselves.

There are actually very obvious and significant considerations that make masturbation or dreams unlikely as the sole agents of Dodgson's pain, not least because of the late onset and the remarkably narrow timespan of his perceived 'sin'. In human nature all things are possible, but it cannot be regarded as a primary likelihood that a man would reach the age of twenty-six or twenty-eight before discovering the function of his genitals or succumbing to some experience of orgasm, either through masturbation or nocturnal emission. And it is perhaps even less likely that, having made this belated discovery, he should throw himself into a frenzy of guilty enjoyment for four short years and thereafter be untroubled by any further sexual prompting for the remaining three decades of his life. Barring serious organic disease, for which there is no other evidence, this has to be considered a remote contingency.

Perhaps more importantly, Dodgson's own diary entries, elliptic as they mostly are, tell a story that does not fit with an image of autoerotic indulgence. Just as the wording and circumstance of Arthur Hugh Clough's nervous confessionals make it evident, without direct confession, that masturbation is the source of his torment, so the wording and circumstance of Dodgson's prayers make it evident that the 'solitary vice' is probably not the source of his. Most obviously, there is the fact that he seems to associate his sin primarily with a certain place – Oxford – and he is always most troubled with guilt while he is there. Between 70 and 80 per cent of his confessions of sin were written there, even though he was spending almost

half his time elsewhere. All of his darkest moments seem to happen there. He acknowledged both directly and indirectly that here was where temptation was to be found and asked his God more than once for strength to 'flee from sin and love holiness [more] than in terms gone by'.

In addition, some of his most detailed diary entries contain references to apparently external happenings intimately connected with his sin and obviously incompatible with self-abuse. On 28 June 1864, for example, he confided a long entry to his diary about an 'event' (he does not say what) that had just happened to him and which he hoped might signal an end of his sinning.

If (as I pray God) this prove the beginning of better things, it will indeed be most blessed. The first half of 1864 is drawing to an end. Oh holy and merciful God, grant for Christ's sake that the second half may be spent more as in Thy sight – that it may not be sullied with the sins that have clouded these six months, and so much of my life hitherto.

'I write this in my photographic studio,' he added, in an uncharacteristic detail, as if the place were part of the significance, 'with the earnest hope that from this may date, by God's blessing, the commencement of a new and better life. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak. Help me, for Christ's sake. Amen, amen.'¹⁴

In 1864 Dodgson's studio was a room he hired over a builder's yard in St Aldate's just minutes away from his lodgings. Inevitably we are left wondering what could possibly befall a man in the relatively public environment described that could possibly render him free of any future threat from self-abuse or wet dreams. Dodgson seems quite obviously to be elliptically describing an external event – something that he feels may be decisive in ending his period of sin, and this seems to fit very badly with any idea that the sin in question was masturbation. This is a view possibly further supported by his own allusions to 'corrupt affection' and the 'inclinations of my own sinful heart', his claim to identify with David the sinner, his repeated invocation of David's hymn of repentance for his adultery, which he returns to, quotes and paraphrases more than any other single extract of the Bible. The inference of this and everything else he wrote at the time seems fairly obvious: he would appear to be alluding to some

kind of sexual contact, not with his lonely self but with another human being.

If it were not 'Lewis Carroll' this probably would have been accepted a long time ago. Once we do accept it many things in his life that are otherwise anomalous begin to be intelligible for the first time. We have a place at last for his love poetry, which has drifted about the edges of his biography for most of the century like an embarrassing guest at a party that no one wants to be seen with. Although, like the prayers of guilt, they tell the most powerful and compelling story his existence has to offer, and although they were evidently a pivotal event in his emotional life, they have remained apart from the biography because the passion and the sexuality expressed therein are simply too entirely incompatible with the 'Carroll' image for them to have been incorporated into the myth of his life.

Over the same period covered by the two missing diary volumes and his personal pain, while he confessed his 'sins' he also began to write, or at least to publish, the only serious love poetry of his life. These, the most unselfconsciously revealing and yet most elliptic personal references he ever made, have been consistently dismissed as irrelevant only because they do not fit the myth-inspired image of Carroll's chaste and child-centred life. But if we put this image aside and consider the facts of Dodgson's existence at this time, the potential autobiography of these strange, allusive poems is irresistible. Sometimes he uses almost identical phrases in his verse and his prayers. The poetry can be seen as a development of these personal essays, as perhaps the product of his obsessive need to explore his internal disarray. The themes explored are of desire, love and loss and crushing, degrading sexual guilt. They read almost like a cycle, the story of a love encounter told in various allegories, from intense joy of first meeting, through the longing for fulfilment, to consummation, guilt, despair and eventually a kind of bored disgust. In this turbulent, confused period of his life, between 1859 and 1868, before and after *Alice*, Dodgson published six completed poems on these themes. Their personal nature is emphasized by the fact that many of them – almost uniquely in his forty-year career – were signed not with any dexterous *nom de plume* but with his own simple initials, 'C.L.D.'

The work, although apparently sparse, constituted a large proportion of his literary output over this time. One of these poems is frankly mediocre,

but the others are much better and infinitely stranger. They are uneven and rambling but also sporadically beautiful and haunted. The penultimate poem in the set is remarkable in its intensity and surprisingly innovative use of verse structure. They remind us that Dodgson's earliest literary ambitions were towards being accepted as a poet.

The themes of the poems are conventional: love and loss. But Dodgson's understanding of them frequently cuts through surface banality to a deeper layer of genuine and sometimes powerfully expressed feeling. In 'Faces in the Fire', dated January 1860, he explores, for the first time, the idea of loneliness that he would return to in his later verse. Describing the 'I' of the poem sitting alone before a dying fire he speaks of the night creeping onwards 'sad and slow' as he conjures the images of a departed loved one in the glowing coals. It is a hymn to loss, to 'the dark refrain of might have been'. There is no denying the stark emptiness of the last verse:

The pictures with their ruddy light
Are changed to dust and ashes white
And I am left alone with night.

Outwardly the poem is the story of a man looking back on his lifelong love for one he met as a child, loved as a woman and finally lost in some unspecified way. But Dodgson uses this fictional scheme to explore the themes that were beginning to obsess him at this time: 'the dark refrain of might have been', the bitterness of lost or unattainable love. He sees his beloved in his mind, although she is now 'strange and far away':

That might have been mine own, my dear,
That might have sat beside me here
Through many and many a happy year ...¹⁵

She is the mother of someone else's children; beyond his reach for ever. They are dark themes for a man still young, and they occur again in 'The Three Sunsets', a rambling, confused poem from 1861. Written while he struggled with his conscience over taking deacon's orders, it deals obsessively with the intensity of falling suddenly in love and the bitter pain of loss:

He saw her once, and in the glance,
A moment's glance of meeting eyes,
His heart stood still in sudden trance,
He trembled with a sweet surprise –
All in the waning light she stood,
The star of perfect womanhood.

The 'he' of the poem and the unnamed lady become lovers, but for unspecified reasons they are forced to part. 'He' of the poem is obsessed with the woman he has had to leave. He sees her face when she is not there and pines for her in traditional poetic style. Interestingly, Dodgson's take on this hopeless longing is not sentimental or romantic but rather impatient, almost sneering:

So by degrees his spirit bent
To mock its own despairing cry
In stern self-torture to invent
New luxuries of agony,
And people all the vacant space
With visions of her perfect face.

He lectures himself and his readers on the pointlessness of this passion; derides the man for allowing 'all his manhood's strength and pride' to be swept aside by 'one sickly dream', of a woman who will never be his. He understands the man's weakness as if it were his own, and it disgusts him. He seems to want to shake him out of it but recognizes his inability to do so. Instead he watches and we watch as 'the man', locked in the prison of his own compulsion, lets his life slip uselessly away and finally dies, alone.¹⁶

In its sense of helplessness in the face of overwhelming compulsion the work prefigures the state of mind that Dodgson would be confessing to his diary only a few months later. He was only weeks away from his deacon's vows. The psychological disturbance of his work is paralleled in the psychological disturbance of his private writings, and, as the state of mind expressed in his diary grew darker, so did his work.

The best of this series of love poems, the extraordinary 'Stolen Waters', was completed in the May of 1862 and appeared in print in the early

summer.¹⁷ For Dodgson it represented an artistic and emotional watershed, a consummation and a coming of age. The stories of love and longing, expressed in conventional metre, that characterized his earlier writing are all thrown aside. In their place he constructs a confession of desire and consummation and sinful pleasure related with a pulsing dreamlike eroticism. As if to emphasize the destructive, compulsive drive of the narrative, he plays chaos with his verse lengths, five lines and four lines and even six lines, intercutting almost at random. Technically it is challenging. Emotionally it is raw and true. With 'Stolen Waters' he touched a lyricism and honesty he was never to find again except in the wild sadness of some portions of *Looking-Glass* and *The Hunting of the Snark*.

Because 'Lewis Carroll' wrote this poem it has inevitably been described as 'coy' in its sexual allusions. In fact, it deserves no such dismissal. For 1862 'Stolen Waters' was anything but coy.

The poem bases itself in the Arthurian never-land beloved of the Pre-Raphaelites. Dodgson uses this familiar landscape for an allegory of seduction, betrayal, guilt and redemption. For the first time since the sad reflectiveness of 'Faces in the Fire' he writes in the first person, emphasizing the confessional nature of the work. From the beginning his language is soft, dreamlike and languid:

The light was faint, and soft the air
That breathed around the place ...

He tells the story of being waylaid 'on my way' by a beautiful woman, 'lithe and tall and fair'. In obvious symbolism she lures him from the path to a place ripe and heavy with flowers and with fruit. He is in her thrall, gripped by the same helplessness that held the nameless 'he' of 'The Three Sunsets'.

I could not say her nay
I could not choose but stay.

Symbolically, she invites him to drink with her – 'sweet is the stolen draught', she said, 'hath sweetness stint or measure?' He takes the offered juice and is flooded by a sensation he describes as 'a fire within my brain'.

My soul within me seemed to melt
In sweet delirious pain.

Gripped by this agony of desire, he kisses her 'false false lips' and swears his love for her. She invites him into a nihilistic sexual encounter – 'what bars us from our Pleasure?' – and almost against his will he succumbs. He hears his own voice, full of a flippancy he does not really feel. He is lost without a struggle and, while his old, happier life dies around him, he copulates with her.

Immediately it is over, he seems to regain some of his senses. The reality of his actions is revealed to him in all its loathsomeness. As he lies with her he sees the flowers fading around him, the fruit rotting in its place,¹⁸ and she is no longer lovely but 'withered, old and grey'. He leaves her, flees from her, but, in obvious allegory, he cannot lose her. She is always pursuing, and he has left his heart with her and carries hers with him:

For hers was now my heart, she said,
The heart that once had been my own,
And in my breast I bore instead
A cold cold heart of stone.

He feels the chill of this cold dead heart within him. He feels an outcast from the world, exiled from everything good and beautiful, and all he can think of is wanting to end his life.

Yea, when one's heart is laid asleep,
What better than to die?

As he wanders in this outland of despair, however, something happens to him. In what seems to be a semi-dream he hears a voice singing, and the words of the song seem to show him the way to his redemption. 'Be as a child,' he is told, 'So shalt thou sing for very joy of breath.' It is for him a moment of Damascene revelation, a voice from heaven. The innocence symbolized by childhood seems to give him hope. He has found his path back to salvation. He recognizes his sin, knows how much he has lost through breaking his 'early vow'. He knows he faces a long struggle to regain his self-respect, but he feels he has been shown the way. The poem ends on a

note of hope that he will somehow be able to discover his lost innocence. He 'see[s] the promise of the years,' if he can only be true in his repentance.

This confessional of a man lured into a relationship of secret sexual pleasure was composed against the background of his own growing admissions of personal sin. In 'Stolen Waters' this 'sin' is given perhaps the only shape he ever allowed it to have outside his own conscience. It is as if life and poetry overlap and seem for a moment to become one expression. In his poetry love and longing were superseded by sinful pleasure and accompanying guilt, and, as in life, guilt casts a longer shadow. 'Pleasure,' capitalized and emphasized, plays like a pulse through the narrative. 'What bars us from our Pleasure? Yea, take we Pleasure while we may.' He could hardly be more frank. It is, as Cohen observed, 'the closest Charles comes to revealing his inner self, his biting fears.'¹⁹ But the inner self thus revealed does not look much like a lonely virginal autoeroticist, rather it is a man helpless in the grip of intoxicating sexual passion.

Six years of darkness and depression intervened before Dodgson produced any more love verse. In that time *Alice* was written and published, and the course of his life was already being changed by it. By 1868 his guilt was becoming a memory. 'Carroll' as myth was already beginning to be sketched in prototype. In an echo of his own poem he had begun to find an identity, and possibly salvation, as a writer for children. That spring, while *Looking-Glass* was still a collection of half-worked ideas, he wrote a strange rambling lyric that was to be the last love poem, and one of the last pieces of entirely adult art, he ever produced.

'The Valley of the Shadow of Death' seems to be a poetic exploration of his state of mind. The potentially totemic significance in his life of the allegorical events outlined in 'Stolen Waters' is emphasized by their virtual repetition here, six years later. The poem is in part a retelling of that story and in part a continuation of it, a restatement and updating six years on.²⁰

Again guilty 'Pleasure' and its aftermath is the basis. Couched this time as the confession of a dying man to his son, the same biblical references, the same story of a man bound with chains to a sinful life, who flees in despair through an allegorical woodland and then finds salvation through the purity of childhood, are employed almost over-emphatically.

However, the differences between this poem and its predecessor are equally significant. During the six years that had passed since 'Stolen Waters' had been written Dodgson had sunk to the deepest despair and risen again. The last poem of the love 'cycle' echoes this journey, in its darker lines, its extended exploration of suicidal depression and hopelessness. Although more clumsy in execution, it captures moments of emotion with subtlety and acuteness. The pleasure described is no longer intoxicating, only dull as a habit that cannot be broken. He explores this state of compulsive boredom in memorable lines:

The spells that bound me with a chain,
Sin's stern behest to do,
Till Pleasure's self, invoked in vain,
A heavy burden grew.

The 'heavy burden' of dead desire and the depression following it saturate the early part of the work. As in 'Stolen Waters' he describes feeling exiled from life and from everything that makes life tolerable. In this work he comes to what seems like the end of the journey, a moment of absolute hopelessness, of the kind confessed in his private prayers some eighteen months earlier when he could see no way out but suicide. He looks into the abode of death and contemplates the pointlessness of his life:

O bitter is it to abide
In weariness alway:
At dawn to sigh for eventide,
At eventide for day ...
What need to lag and linger on
Till life be cold and grey?

He feels on the brink of letting go, of entering death, where he will at least find oblivion and the cessation of pain. But he is rescued from his moment of weakness by the same kind of visionary experience that touched him in 'Stolen Waters', this time of 'two fair children, side by side, that rested from their play'; this glimpse of innocence and beauty gives him the strength to rediscover his sense of hope, his virtue and the possibility of a true, uncorrupting love.

‘Stolen Waters’ and ‘The Valley of the Shadow of Death’ are clearly companion pieces. They were written six years apart, on either side of his psychological crisis. Sin lies in the midst of them, as in the midst of his life, not as some biblical abstract but as something real, black as old cinders, dark with memory and experience. It is a thing to be looked back on with horror, although it might be left ‘half a life behind’. In poetry and in prayers Dodgson confessed himself a castaway, lost in the toils of a compulsion he could not control. He felt his heart as somehow dead, complained of his own ‘coldness and hardness of heart’ and implored God to ‘warm into life this cold love for thee’. This inner chill was real for him and evidently symbolic of his perceived distance from God’s grace. The ‘I’ of the poems betrays some unspecified ‘vow’ when he sleeps with his seductress. Dodgson had taken – with God knows what reluctance – deacon’s vows only five months before and was later to describe it as a ‘desecration’ to have done so.

His work is not just an allegorical confession of a fall from grace it is the blueprint for his perceived redemption, his future life – the recipe for salvation as he saw it for himself, in which the child, as innocent, became a vital symbolic means of retrieving that state of grace. The poems are a key to his perception of his future life, as renunciation and consecration on the altar of Childhood.

The period of turmoil, and the poetry he produced, mark the transition point in Dodgson’s life from youthful optimism, creativity, ambition and drive to the strange, rudderless, unproductive middle age of sentimental piety and the worship of the child. It has yet to be assimilated into the biography as a single and formulative event. The various aspects of Dodgson’s psychological crisis have been presented in such a fragmented manner for so long that the picture they make when fitted back together has not yet been recognized. His religious problems have been explained as a fear of preaching or as a result solely of his growing religious doubts, his prayers as over-conscientiousness or a sudden deluge of self-abuse, his poetry as largely irrelevant. The fact that they all happened within one brief period of his life, and all combine to tell the same story, has gone unnoticed among the mythology. It is – with only slight exaggeration – as if Wilde’s biography had been created and maintained without reference to *Reading Gaol*.

The crisis, whatever its cause, was overwhelming, and it changed his life. In part it was probably an expression of his deep religious doubts, but it is hard to conclude this is all it was. A review of the evidence indicates overwhelmingly that the kernel of this crisis was probably sexual.

The only biographer to recognize any part of the true nature of this episode, Morton Cohen, has observed that:

His self-rebukes, his protests about this sinful life, his importunities for God to help him improve, decline as the thread that connects his life to the deanery unwinds; as the mentions of the Liddell children vanish, his complaints and resolves subside. The conjunction of these two currents, flowing side by side, must mean something.²¹

Cohen unhesitatingly ascribes this to Dodgson's supposed love for the real Alice. But there are obvious difficulties with this – not least the nature of Dodgson's sense of sin, which does not seem to imply a man tortured with lust for a child. But Cohen's comment is still quite perceptive and quite true. The development of Dodgson's pain seems to parallel the development of his friendship with 'the Deanery'; that is to say with the Liddell family who lived there – the 'real Alice', her siblings and her parents. In fact, they seem to be there, at the epicentre of his unnamed suffering, his interaction with them just as muffled, unexplained and allusive as any other aspect of this curious time in his life.

The Broad and the High

I am the Dean, this Mrs Liddell;
 She plays the first, I, second fiddle.
 She is the Broad; I am the High;
 We are the University.

– Anon., *Balliol Rhymes*

BESIDES the lacunae in the diary record, the anomalous and heartfelt prayers in the surviving portions, the ventures into romantic poetry, one other factor marks out the troubled period from the late 1850s to the mid-1860s from the remainder of Dodgson's life – his association with the family that was to acquire through him an odd, secondhand immortality.

On 2 June 1855 Thomas Gaisford, the old Dean of Christ Church, died. With him went the last period of stability the college would know for some time. Within five days his successor had been appointed by the Crown. *The Times* announces that Liddell of Westminster is to be the new Dean: the selection does not seem to have given much satisfaction in College; Dodgson noted laconically in his diary on 7 June.¹ His suspicion was instinctive; young Dodgson was, in the tradition of his family, a Conservative and the new Dean was a Liberal. But his comment also reflected a wider unease felt throughout Christ Church about the appointment.

Liddell, one-time headmaster of Westminster School, was indeed a controversial choice to head a college as powerful and tradition-ridden as Christ Church. Although he was an old boy of the college himself, he was regarded there with rank suspicion. In 1850 he had been a member of a Royal Commission appointed to inquire into university reform, and this had been greeted with great hostility at the House. He was thought by some to be a rabid 'reformer', and trouble was expected on this score.

Henry George Liddell was supremely a man of his time. He was highly intelligent, deeply learned. In partnership with Robert Scott he published a massive and thorough Greek lexicon that was a standard work for many years. He espoused the Liberalism of the nineteenth century: a loose and unstructured concept of enlightened and unrestrained capitalism, perhaps rather more similar to monetarism than to the centre-left politics of today. He had natural dignity and a well-developed sense of justice, but he was also a skilful, and sometimes ruthless, player of the game of politics. As a disciplinarian he did not shrink from administering physical punishment and could beat the boys in his charge until they were scarred.

He had been born into the ranks of the minor aristocracy and had inherited the aristocratic presumption of the divine right to rule. As Chaplain to Prince Albert, the Prince Consort, and with Gladstone as a personal friend, Liddell enjoyed favour and influence at the very centre of the Victorian power structure and was very much a government right-hand man. He was, like so many Liberals of his time, by nature a benign but absolute autocrat, and beneath an exterior of detached gravitas he was an ambitious man, anxious to make his mark on the political and academic world of his day.

Tall – well over six foot – and strongly built, in his youth he had been handsome and he was always physically imposing, but premature ageing and baldness quickly lost him his classical appeal. In his private life he was, by all accounts, fairly kindly. In an age of terrifying patriarchs his family feared him ‘not a whit’ and his children remembered him with reverence and affection. But for all his admirable qualities of ‘learning and simplicity’ he was a cool and distant man with no knack for personal friendship. Imprisoned in the strait-jacket of a well-meaning but awkward and formal personality, he found socializing difficult and tended to retreat into chilly and unsettling silence in company. He presented a ‘somewhat stern aspect’, had ‘no small talk’ and was described, even by his admiring biographer H.L. Thompson, as ‘not a little irresponsive in ordinary conversation’: ‘The undergraduates, who were conscientiously asked to breakfast at the Deanery, were often painfully nervous in his company, and he seemed to share their feelings.’

Behind this unyielding exterior more unusual responses bubbled and heaved. A vein of maudlin and humourless sentimentality ran through the middle of his deepest nature and expressed itself with lachrymose vulcanism when roused. With his gravitas, his reserve and perhaps a certain pained suspicion of other people's humour, Liddell's emotional experience, or at least its expression, seemed dominated by weeping. He wept easily, at least on paper. 'I can scarce see to write for tears,' he confided when his lifelong friend Arthur Stanley, who was, in whatever sense, one of the great loves of his life, moved away from Oxford to London.²

Inevitably, this side of his nature found its ultimate expression as a response to death, to which subject he brought his own slightly disturbing combination of Victorian sentimentality and detached curiosity. He put on the black crape of nineteenth-century funeral sentimentality with more than common relish. Announcing the death of his daughter Edith from peritonitis, he wrote: 'Her death was caused by the purely accidental lodgement of some hard substance, such as an orange pip or a cherry stone, in a particular part of the intestine, which produced peritonitis and slew her.'

When his three-year-old son lay dying of scarlet fever he sent bulletins about the situation to his absent wife that tearfully described the kind of awful detail she might have preferred to do without. 'Mr H. just asked if he should cut some of the dry skin off his lips – "No," he said, "Wa' it off." (Wash it off.) ... If ever there was one fit for the society of angels it is he, and his poor, pale face and soft, blue eyes seem to me, as I look on them weeping, no more to belong to earth.'³

Such grotesque physical suffering relayed in baby language has a bizarre, slightly necrophiliac horror to modern eyes. It reads like the faux melancholy of some unpleasantly excited funeral director. But to judge Liddell by such visceral response would be unfair. He loved his children, and his response to their deaths was genuine. There are people who seem, in some tortured way, to come alive fully only as a response to their own and others' suffering. Perhaps Liddell was one of them. Perhaps it was in his nature, griffin-like, to find his only real emotional expression in the sad and the melancholic.

If Liddell had any early involvements with women they have gone unrecorded. Before marriage his principal emotional outlets seem to have

been strong attachments to male friends and colleagues, 'passionate friendships' of the kind enjoyed by so many institutionalized Victorian men, principal among which was the long and devoted attachment to his fellow churchman and Liberal and sometime right-hand man Arthur Penrhyn Stanley. This friendship was pivotal in Liddell's life. Stanley was not simply his first and most important political ally he was also an enduring and vital source of emotional support. Liddell loved him while he was alive and mourned him in death with an intensity that seems to overshadow every other expression of feeling in his life, even his attachment to his wife and children. In important ways Liddell and Stanley were, and remained, a more significant partnership than Liddell and Lorina.

Liddell's choice of principal passionate friend was a delicately handsome man whose life was characterized by sexual ambivalence. He remained a bachelor until his forty-eighth year, living with his mother and enjoying a series of close masculine friendships. His marriage, at nearly fifty, was greeted by those who knew him with consternation and amusement, rather like Liddell's own. At school at Rugby Stanley's prettiness earned him the nickname 'Nancy', and he was the original for Thomas Hughes's portrait of Arthur, the fragile outsider in *Tom Brown's Schooldays*. Later, at Balliol, he became the protégé of mathematics and logic tutor William George Ward, a charismatic and forceful individual who made little attempt to disguise the homoerotic nature of his relationships with his most favoured students.

Ward gathered around him a group of intelligent, sensitive and attractive youths with whom he played extended games of courtship and over whom he would seek to exert excessive control. Like Stanley, Arthur Hugh Clough was a member of this circle, and his diaries show the atmosphere of feverish and straining eroticism that pervaded. Ward behaved like a lover to his favourites, courting them, urging them to declare their love, to call him 'dear' and to make what Clough called 'unnatural demonstrations'. Clough himself was reluctant to concede these intimacies, but Stanley was Ward's 'bosom friend and constant associate, the Pylades to his Orestes';⁴ he lived at the very centre of Ward's fevered Balliol ménage, and when he finally broke away from this intense emotional entanglement it was only to begin another – this time with Henry Liddell.

We do not know precisely when the friendship between these two men began, but in 1837 they both became tutors at Oxford, Stanley at University College and Liddell at Christ Church. It is probable that they met soon after. Liddell took Ward's place in Stanley's affections, and their passionate friendship remained lifelong. It 'ripened into that close and affectionate intimacy which only closed with Stanley's death ... No other friend exercised so much influence as did Stanley over Liddell's opinions, or had so great a share of his confidence and affection.'⁵

By the time Liddell married, he and Stanley had known one another for nearly ten years, and although both eventually acquired wives they remained a central emotional focus for one another. A cache of unpublished letters in the jumbled archive at Christ Church testifies to their enduring relationship. No permission has yet been given to publish more than a fragment of them, but amid the exchange of politics and business they tell an evolving, and quite moving, story of a mutual love and mutual respect that was devoted and passionate.

In modern eyes this raises modern questions of Liddell's sexual orientation. But this is to miss the point. The friendship between Liddell and Stanley was certainly touched with the exclusivity and the intensity that we associate with sexual love, and perhaps in some sense they were 'in love' with one another. When Stanley unexpectedly married and left Oxford at the age of forty-eight, Liddell wrote to him, accusatory and tearful, expressing his anguish at what he unambiguously called his desertion. The intensity of the feeling expressed, the suggestion that Stanley's marriage as much as his leaving Christ Church was a source of anguish and betrayal, is both touching and revealing. But Liddell's friendship with Stanley, like Tennyson's with Arthur Hallam, the Earl of Selbourne's with Frederick Faber, was a wholly Victorian arrangement, the kind that became impossible only after Wilde's public humiliation made overt and unacceptable what had previously been tacit and acceptable. Stanley's position of favour within the Liddell family, and the deep emotional commitment both men felt free to give one another, despite the presence of women in their lives, sprang directly from the age's fascination with the classical/biblical image of love between men: Pylades and Orestes, David and Jonathan. 'Our affection for each other became not only strong, but passionate,' wrote Selbourne of his

own lifelong male beloved. ‘There is a place for passion, even in friendship; it was so among the Greeks; and the love of Jonathan for David was “wonderful, passing the love of women”’⁶

Liddell’s marriage, when it came, might have been as much a union of mutual advantage as mutual passion. It coincided, quite conveniently, with his candidature for the Headship of Westminster School. Men in such posts were traditionally expected to have a wife, to bring domestic stability into the school environment. Liddell’s timely acquisition of a glowing young fiancée cannot have hindered his ultimately successful bid for the job.

His chosen wife, Lorina Reeve, was fifteen years younger than him and of a considerably lower social class. Her Lowestoft family was not by any means distinguished, but Lorina was rescued from obscurity by her looks. She was ‘a beauty of the Spanish type’, tall, dark and exotic with black hair and eyes and a strong, voluptuous figure. She was bright, with a quick mind, a ‘magnetic personality’, firm opinions and a lively sense of humour. Her elderly aunt, Lady Smith, thought that she might be too susceptible to male attention and in danger of throwing herself away on ‘the common herd of sporting, tandemdriving men’. Her marriage to steady, dependable and, of course, wealthy Liddell was perceived as ‘deliver[ing] Lorina from the clutches of lesser, “fast” men’.⁷

They were married in July 1846, when Lorina was twenty and Henry was a prematurely ageing thirty-five. He acquired a young and decorative wife as well as a challenging new job. Lorina acquired a welcome escape from her lowly provincial origins and access to the high society that fascinated her and in which she was determined to shine. The union surprised and amused at least one prominent member of London society. ‘Dear brave old Liddell!’ his old schoolmate, the novelist W.M. Thackeray, observed: ‘he ... has taken a 3rd rate provincial lady (rather first rate in the beauty line though I think) for a wife. They are like the couples in the old comedies.’⁸

Whether or not it was initially a love match – and only the two of them could know the truth of that – as a partnership the marriage proved successful. Henry’s patrician breeding and natural authority, allied with Lorina’s beauty and forceful charm, made a formidable combination. Their alliance helped them both to achieve their personal ambitions: his for power

and influence in his chosen profession; hers for power and influence in society.

In the autumn of 1846 Lorina took her place at the side of the new headmaster of Westminster School. While Liddell turned his energies to rescuing the establishment from the 'bullying, idleness and squalor' into which it had sunk, while he in the words of his own bizarre metaphor 'threw down the gauntlet and made a clean sweep', his wife enjoyed the delights of London society. In fervent letters to the family back home she recorded the wonders she found there: the gossip, the dresses, the famous people she met, the dining customs of the awesomely rich. Her looks and her vitality achieved immediate notice. After the Queen's Ball in 1847 Lady Smith was delighted to be told by her friend Lady Elizabeth Spencer Stanhope that Lorina had been 'decidedly, if not the very prettiest, certainly one of the loveliest and most beautifully dressed of the guests there, as she was also voted to be at the drawing room.'⁹

As 'Mrs Headmaster' this 'loveliest' creature was also, at hardly more than twenty, required to be mother-substitute to the pupils in her husband's care. Although this was perhaps less congenial to her nature than the frocks and the partying, she was kind and supportive and well loved. She was young and attractive enough to be seen by the post-pubescent boys as a romantic and appealing object and, unsurprisingly, she became a focus for them. She treated them with charming informality, joining in their theatricals, providing costumes and showing the pupils given female roles how to walk like a woman, 'restraining their stride within feminine limits'. The legacy of her dazzling effect on these lads, otherwise insulated from the glamour of femininity, is preserved in an archly written little account of her arrival at a school performance of *Eunuchus* in 1854:

And now, at about 5 to 7 ... the young Westminsters stand up, and everybody in the house imitates their example, to welcome Mrs Headmaster, who appears leaning on the arm of the Captain, who for this minute or two looks as happy as anyone in knee-breeches and buckles can be expected to look. This is a most artfully devised plan to raise the ambition of small-town boys, who always on play nights wish from the very bottom of their hearts that they might some day, as Captains, enjoy the privilege of escorting Mrs Headmaster ...¹⁰

As the principal female in a society of young males she inevitably became the focus of aspiration and fevered longing. The youths named a boat after her, and one St Valentine's day an anonymous donor left a basket of ripe plums in silent tribute outside her door.

She was fertile and lost no time in giving the Dean a family. There was Henry, known as 'Harry', in 1847, Lorina, known as 'Ina', in 1849 and three more children over the next five years. Life had its downside as well. In 1848 Lorina caught typhoid and nearly died, and in 1853 her infant son died of scarlet fever. But she was strong and she survived.

The little tribute to her feminine appeal for the boys of Westminster quoted was written by ex-pupil Germain Lavie in 1855. By the time he composed it nineteen-year-old Lavie had become an undergraduate at Christ Church and one of young Dodgson's first ever mathematics pupils. Within a year Lorina and her husband and their four children made the same move to the same establishment.

When Mr and Mrs Liddell arrived in Oxford in the spring of 1856 they both, in their different ways for their different reasons, began immediately to attract attention. Liddell was received by Christ Church as an infiltrator from a distrusted government. His actions, his intentions, all were suspect and, in some ways, rightly so. His brief was to 'modernize' the college, and in practice this meant, as it so often does, the centralization and concentration of power. No one could seriously argue that Christ Church, with its medieval infrastructure of custom and privilege, was not in need of change, and many of the reforms Liddell eventually engendered in the 1858 ordinance were intelligent and necessary. There was an increased stipend for Senior Students (a newly created distinction) from around £90 to £200; candidature for Studentships was thrown open to men from other colleges; and there was a rationalizing of the teaching system, including increased provision of specialized tutoring, all of which led to an undeniable improvement in academic standards. In so far as this went, it was clearly advantageous.

However, the reforms were not in any sense about extending democracy, and they made little attempt to deal with the basically corrupt infrastructure of nepotism and patronage that was the college's chief ill. Rather, they grasped the system of grace and favour and used it to achieve a gentlemanly

palace revolution, with the new Dean as incoming tsar. The result of the 1858 reforms, and of almost every move Liddell made thereafter, was to increase his personal power. However idealistic his aims may have been in the abstract, in practical terms they were about extending his control into something resembling an autocracy. He did this, in part, by clever but ultimately destructive use of the precept of divide and rule – by exploiting the fundamental conflict between the college's academic and ecclesiastical roles that had existed in some measure since its foundation.

Christ Church was at once a university college and the diocesan cathedral of Oxford, and its principal difficulty lay in the fact that the ecclesiastical governing body – the Dean and Canons – administered both functions and were immensely powerful as a result, while the academic body, the Students, occupied a very junior position. The Students – who were the nearest thing to an academic Fellowship that Christ Church possessed – quite understandably resented this and felt they ought to have the same autonomy over academic matters that was accorded the Fellows of all other Oxford colleges. Bickering over this and related issues was to some extent endemic. Before Liddell's 1858 reforms the antagonisms existed in a condition of equilibrium in which conflict was usually avoided, but his new statutes and the 'untenability of the compromise between Chapter and Students' effectively brought old resentments to a head.

The Students' 'new powers' were, in effect, largely cosmetic. They still had no proper voice in college government, and the fact that the Canons could now be appointed from outside the college meant that the Students hence-forward would be governed by a body of clerics, many of whom had no real connection with Christ Church as an academic establishment and 'the majority of whom in all probability will have been practically unacquainted with the education or discipline of the House'. The degree of fellow feeling that had existed alongside the antagonism in the days when the large majority of Canons were ex-Students was destroyed, and something more like open warfare began to take its place. Osborne Gordon, Dodgson's superior in the library, spoke for most of the Students when he commented brusquely: 'If change was necessary they ought to have put the Students here on the level of Fellows elsewhere.' When Liddell failed to execute this one undeniable justice he guaranteed unrest and confrontation.

The result of Liddell's reforms was a disgruntled body of Canons, still immensely powerful but in no mind to compromise with anyone, and an academic body bereft of all significant power and deeply resentful of the Canons. In this fragmented situation Liddell moved to reduce the number of Canons from eight to six. The nominal effect of this was that they and the Students would have the same number of representatives on the new Electoral Board, but the practical outcome was that Students and Canons became, for all legislative purposes, an irresistible force meeting an immovable object. Almost every debate would end in stalemate, and Liddell, as the possessor of an almost guaranteed casting vote, was in a very enviable position indeed. As the authors of the definitive analysis of this period observed: 'It was a system which might have been designed to promote conflict and, in such a situation, the Dean was at the centre of power.'¹¹

By placing himself as the pivot and arbiter between the ecclesiastical and academic bodies he achieved maximum personal power at the expense of the internal cohesion of the college. It would be an insult to Liddell's subtlety and intelligence to suggest that this was accidental.

While the Canons and Students were embroiled in their mutual antagonism, Liddell made the moves to secure the unassailability of his own position. With sometimes devious manipulation he used his authority and his influence in high places to neutralize opposition and secure the appointment of his friends and supporters to a succession of influential posts within the college. Having, through the 1858 ordinance, reduced the number of Canons from eight to six, he worked steadily to get his own supporters in the ranks of those remaining. The first of these was none other than his beloved Arthur Stanley, appointed to the first available Canonry and, as early as 1856, to the newly created post of Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History. Other allies followed into positions of power, as deaths and retirements of present incumbents allowed. Most notable, and ultimately controversial, of these was the appointment of his old friend Benjamin Jowett to the Regius Chair of Greek.

With this carefully placed network of support, and with the continuing internecine warfare among what might have constituted his opposition, Liddell made himself Master of Christ Church with more autonomy than any previous Dean had ever enjoyed, and this was no small achievement.

Those who controlled Christ Church, with its wealth, its patronage and the enormous ecclesiastical power of its cathedral, effectively controlled the university in many of its most important functions. Not only that, they had their hands on a vast source of private enrichment. Christ Church was one of the largest colleges and comfortably the wealthiest; its Canons had the status of Heads of College on the Hebdomadal Board, the university's governing body, giving Christ Church, in effect, a ninefold increase in voting power over every other college. In addition, the Dean and Canons were entitled to distribute approximately two-thirds of Christ Church's enormous annual income among themselves. This was a rich living by anyone's standards. However, the Dean and his inner circle were not to go entirely unchallenged in their ascendancy.

As the full implications of the reforms began to be realized, and as Liddell's centralized hold began to squeeze, some of the Students became increasingly worried by the Dean's personal ambitions and by their own resulting political emasculation. This culminated in the early 1860s in a radical rebellion by a handful of agitators, led by Thomas Prout, intent upon breaking the new and overweening power of the Dean and Chapter and asserting the right of the dons to manage their own affairs.

Dodgson was to be one of these rebels, and this unprecedented political confrontation in the very heart of the establishment was to be the background for the curious, curtailed and secretive relationship between Dodgson, the Dean's children and the Dean's wife.

While her husband set about making himself ruler of his new domain Lorina made her own personal fiefdom of Oxford society. With her social position, with her London-polished ways, her beauty and her domineering vivacity, she was set to be noticed, and her aim to make herself the uncrowned queen of the university, premier lady of the city, was soon realized. Within months of her arrival Oxford life revolved around her and her whims. Her favour was an index of social success. If one wanted to be visible, perceived to be in the ascendant, one hoped that the invitations to her table or her musical parties kept coming, and when they stopped one worried. She wanted her power and she wielded it, dispensing favour or 'social executions' as she chose. She turned the Deanery of Christ Church into 'a social centre not easily rivalled anywhere else'.

In company Lorina was free with her gossip and opinions, hardly caring if she gave offence; 'indiscreet as well as waspish'. She deferred to no one and she made the rules rather than obeying them. When, in a burst of Calvinism, the Vice-Chancellor of the university banned all theatricals from the city, Lorina openly defied him to attend an 'illegal' performance in the Cornmarket and 'boldly left her carriage at the door'. No one dared challenge her.¹² Socially she was often perceived to dominate her quiescent husband. The famous 'Balliol rhyme' that declaims 'she plays the first, I second fiddle', and the description of the Dean in *Vanity Fair* as 'thoroughly domesticated',¹³ certainly lend support to this view, but the truth was more likely that Liddell was content to allow his wife her own space to play monarch and kill with looks. He had little interest in the personal aspect of power, the 'networking', the informal alliances forged at the dinner table and the on dance floor, and this was where his wife excelled. It would have been sound politics to play second fiddle to her in these matters, and the Dean was, above all, a politician. He benefited from her glamour and her charm. Their spheres of influence were separate and complementary. It was a beautiful arrangement.

Dodgson's first recorded meeting with the new Dean's wife and her children occurred on 25 February 1856. His diary records that on that day he walked to the river with his cousin Frank and there met 'the Liddell party (Mrs L., her sister and the two eldest children)'.¹⁴ They watched the boat races together. Thereafter, Dodgson became a fairly regular visitor to the Deanery and was soon closely, ambivalently, involved with the family.

For some reason it has become a vital part of the Carroll myth that his relationship with the Dean's wife was predominantly one of hostility, irritation and distrust. He is usually portrayed as having been barely tolerated by a woman who had an instinctive antipathy towards him and who almost immediately suspected his intentions towards her vulnerable infant daughters as 'excessive, intrusive, improper, perhaps impure'. This has become such a firmly rooted conviction that almost everything that occurred between Dodgson and the Dean's wife, sometimes even the most unequivocal signs of favour, are viewed by biographers, quite irrationally, as indications of antagonism. This impression of continuing hostility was deliberately reinforced by later members of the Liddell family, particularly

Alice's son Caryl Hargreaves, who repeatedly went out of his way to emphasize to various biographers the distance, dislike or indifference with which his grandmother had regarded Lewis Carroll. His reasons for doing so remain obscure, since, however much ready acceptance it gained in the biography, it was never more than an aspect of the myth. Dodgson's own diaries evidence an entirely different kind of relationship.

From the early months of Lorina's residence at the Deanery his diaries record that he was welcomed there with more than usual kindness. Although his relationship with the Dean began as cautious and deteriorated into mutual suspicion, his relationship with Lorina and her children became almost immediately warm and remained intimate for many years. Without apparently making any special effort he became the recipient of her much-sought-after social approval. Invitations to dinner, to musical evenings and other favours began to come his way. And there were more marked signs of friendship.

Dodgson had just taken up photography, and this messy new art required more space than he had in his lodgings. He soon began using Lorina's family as models and her home as a kind of unofficial studio and storage place. He was there all the time and apparently happily at home, photographing, developing, mixing chemicals, passing the time with mother and children. It was always his single-minded and manipulative way to get himself more than his fair share of leeway and favour, wherever he might be and whoever he might deal with, but the amount of baggage and clutter, the penetrating chemical smells, the sheer dirt involved in the 'black art' of nineteenth-century photography meant that when Dodgson set up his workshop in her home he was receiving, in addition to her social favours, a great deal of generosity and tolerance from this fastidious and not overly tolerant woman. More than tolerance, she encouraged him, visited his rooms and urged him to photograph her children. During the summer vacation of 1857 she wrote to him from her holiday home and he sent her albums of his photographs.

In the face of the amount of evidence now available in Dodgson's unexpurgated diary pointing unavoidably to the warmth that characterized Lorina's reception of him, it has become increasingly difficult for scholarship to justify perpetuating the image of hostility, and some writers have begun

to recognize that reassessment is due. 'It has been alleged that Mrs Liddell disliked Carroll and that she resented his contact with her children,' wrote the late Raphael Shaberman. 'Why, then, did she not forbid this contact? This has never been adequately explained ... Could it be that she liked him?'¹⁵

This would seem a natural assumption, but myths are not so easily dismantled. In order to maintain an existing viewpoint many biographers endeavour to portray Lorina's evident leniency and favour as being somehow wrung from her against her will and better judgement. Facts are sometimes mangled to breaking point to squeeze a drop of potential antagonism. When Dodgson's diary records that he went over to the Deanery to photograph some friends of the Dean's but found them on the point of going out for the day, this is described in most biographies as some manipulation of Lorina's to keep Dodgson from getting his way. She is described as seeing his action as 'an inexcusable social gaffe' and as taking 'evasive action', even though there is no record anywhere of her opinions on the matter and no mention of her being directly involved in any way. One biographer was even reduced to the ultimate bankruptcy of observing that 'her distaste for Charles, *in spite of all outward appearance* [emphasis added], was deep, firm and permanent'.¹⁶

This is surely the need to believe in its most naked form; the biography of intuition in which black is known, 'in spite of all outward appearance', to be white. If we adopt a more open view, we are forced to concede that what made Dodgson notable in the college was not Mrs Liddell's hostility but the continued latitude that she allowed him and his unusually close contact with her and her family. The suggestion that she endured this close contact against her will is nonsensical. Lorina Liddell was not a lady to do anything against her will, nor one to stand on ceremony in pursuit of getting what she wanted. She thought nothing of offending the highest of high society with her gossip and pretensions; the *amour propre* of one insignificant junior don would not have given her a moment's pause. She had no reason to tolerate Dodgson if she did not choose to. This lady put up with him 'continually haunting the Deanery, arriving at all hours and rushing backwards and forwards with the dirty collodion plates' because she wanted to.¹⁷

It is fairly easy to see why she might have found his company congenial. Private life at the Deanery with her older, sometimes ailing and preoccupied husband must have been less than exciting without the lubrication of other company. 'The house is awfully dull and quiet,' Lorina wrote in 1872, in the ennui following her older daughters' departure for France. 'Papa and I are quite tired of each other already.'¹⁸ No doubt this was often true in the gaps between social engagements when the evenings dragged. Henry was absorbed in plans for a physical renovation of Christ Church to follow the administrative makeover, and when he was not in meetings he spent most of his day in his study working at college matters or on endless revisions of his lexicon. However deep the affection between them she could not help but find him dull sometimes, and the antidote to this was obvious. At Christ Church, as at Westminster, she was almost the only female focus in an aggressively all-male environment. A small amount of flirtation with the young men who surrounded her would be a harmless way to bring a little sparkle into her life.

Dodgson was attractive in his way, and very charming when he wanted to be. They shared a vivacity of spirit, a quickness of mind and an ability to find fun in life's absurdities. When Lorina went to hear John Ruskin give one of his first lectures as Slade Professor of Art she was delighted with the surreal craziness of his disconnected and half-mad narrative, describing it as 'of the wildest kind', but Henry was merely irritated. She wanted to go back and enjoy it all again, hoping it would be 'as wonderful and incomprehensible as the last', but she could not persuade her husband. 'The Dean says he shall not go again to listen to such nonsense ...' Dodgson would have understood exactly why she wanted to go back.¹⁹

The uncertainty and allusiveness surrounding his contact with this family is such that even the precise date of his first meeting with the Dean and his wife seems to be in doubt. It has always been assumed he encountered them first when he records meeting Lorina and her children in Oxford shortly after Liddell's appointment, but it is possible that three previously undetected consecutive cut pages from Dodgson's diary covering five days in mid-August 1855 may well cover a previous meeting. These pages cover a brief holiday that the 23-year-old took in Whitburn, visiting relatives there. On 23 March that year he had failed the Johnson Scholarship

examination, and with his usual heedless optimism promised himself to try harder next time:

The scholarship papers seem such as I ought to be able to do with a year's more reading, and I am in very good hopes of getting it next time.

But on 20 August he went back to this entry to bring it up to date, adding this observation:

As I have learnt the Dean's intention of making me Mathematical Lecturer next term, I shall not go in for the Scholarship again.²⁰

This, 20 August, is at the end of the time covered by the three cut pages. Dodgson added this note during the time he was making the other diary entries that are now lost. The fact that he learned this information in a place to which his mail would not normally be addressed suggests that he did not hear by letter but in person from the Dean himself. This is actually quite plausible, as Henry Liddell's cousin, Sir Adolphus Liddell, had a house not very far from Whitburn, and we know that Dodgson became acquainted with members of this local Liddell family at precisely the time he made this entry in his diary. It is possible therefore that Henry Liddell may have been visiting his relatives in the north-east of England and Dodgson encountered him socially. What other members of the family would have been present at this introduction? Certainly not the children, since later comments in Dodgson's diary make it explicitly clear that he met them for the first time in the spring of 1856. But the Dean's wife may well have been with her husband at this time. We know from the evidence of later years that the Dean and his wife would take a holiday in the north sometimes, leaving the children at home.

It seems fairly possible that in August 1855 Henry Liddell and his wife were holidaying with their relatives near Whitburn. Dodgson, also staying in the area, ran across them, probably by chance, and was introduced, and Dean Liddell was able to tell him in person of his appointment to the Mathematical Lectureship. Were the three missing pages removed to obscure any such meeting or for some other reason? We can never really know, of course, but, given the general air of secrecy and oddness covering his contact with them, this is thought-provoking at very least. Even more

curiously, the subsequent volume of his diary, covering October to December of that year, is also among those missing. We can only speculate about why or whether it has any bearing on the questions raised here.

For Dodgson the friendship he began with her family was to set a precedent in his life. In a pattern that, once established, was to be repeated more than once in his later years, he stepped in to fill a void left by an absent, detached or busy father, became entangled in a relationship centred on the children and including the mother but largely excluding the male parent, and the children almost immediately began to see him as a primary emotional focus in their lives. With his charm and his humour, his supple inventive mind and his manipulateness, Dodgson was born to be adored easily by children. When he arrived in the Deanery garden, young, attractive, equipped with an exciting new camera and all the mystique of newness surrounding him, he must have been one of the most colourful and beguiling objects on the Liddell children's horizon. He made immediate friends with them, particularly the eldest, eight-year-old Harry, who developed a tendency to tag along at his heels and whose gushing enthusiasm at hearing Dodgson preach – 'You've got your white gown on, and you *read in the church!*' – suggests a kind of hero-worship.²¹ Their father, twenty years older, in frail health and preoccupied with work, would have seemed a dull and distant prospect by comparison.

Lorina's children were among the very first sitters for Dodgson's camera. Harry was nearly nine when he began to be photographed; his three sisters, Ina, Alice and Edith, were seven, four and two. They were all astonishingly beautiful. Alice and Harry had inherited their mother's exotic darkness; Edith was a Pre-Raphaelite redhead; Ina had an extraordinarily sultry pout. Dodgson was addicted to physical beauty. For their various reasons the man and the beautiful family found each other irresistible. The friendship developed swiftly. The Liddell home became semi-permanent studio and darkroom. At the same time Lorina's mother, Mrs Reeve, seems to have taken a dislike to him. Dodgson obliquely refers to this hostility several times in his diary but, typically, never develops nor gives any explanation for it.²² It remains just another aspect of the allusive, seemingly veiled nature of aspects of his contact with the family.

The development of his relationship with them can only be inferred a lot of the time, since his diary makes little explicit about what he was doing or saying. He gives no specific idea of how often he is at the Deanery or much of what he does while he is there. We are left to assume he is there a lot from the tenor of his own oblique comments and from the fact he interpreted a chance remark of Mrs Liddell's as a hint that he had been visiting her home too much. He tells his diary after this, with a suggestion of stifled hurt pride, that he has resolved to stay away for a while. But the misunderstanding was apparently speedily forgotten, although he does not say how or why, and he was back there, photographing and visiting pretty soon. He was, again uncharacteristically and rather oddly, anxious, almost frantic, to make his end-of-term photographs of the family a success, waking himself up in the early hours of the morning and even delaying his planned departure in order to try to achieve a few good negatives. He failed in every attempt and was 'nearly in despair'.²³ It mattered a lot to him, but he doesn't say why. But we do know that for the first, but not the last time, his behaviour began to present a challenge to convention. The close contact with the family quickly became the source of gossip. There were rumours of romantic involvements with the governess, Mary Prickett, about which he made incredulous comment in his diary.²⁴

And then, of course, just over two years after the Liddells arrived in Oxford, there is the dramatic four-year break in Dodgson's diary. There is little information about what he did, how he felt. All we can divine is that this 'missing' time was some kind of watershed, marking a period of transition between the youthful carefree Dodgson and the anxious, allusive, guilt-haunted man of the 1860s. What occasioned the change we can do no more than guess at, or at best infer. As we have seen, coincidentally with this period of change, and in the midst of the diary lacuna, he began writing and publishing his first and only love poetry. The episodic poems of variable artistic value told a story of falling suddenly and hopelessly in love with a 'star of perfect womanhood'; of lovers who declare their love but have to part; of a man bereft, anguished, filled with a longing for a woman who is 'out of reach'. A man who despises himself for wasting his life on a hopeless dream of 'love denied' but who cannot shake himself out of the feeling, and

who even contemplates leaving the place where he lives and works as the only way to avoid being confronted with daily reminders.

How closely this poetry tells the story of his emotional experience through the four blank years is something we can never know. What we do know, however, is that where his poetry can be compared with contemporary events in his life for which we do have evidence, some autobiographical elements emerge. Dodgson had indeed, and after a huge inner struggle, finally taken his deacon's vows only months before completing the poem in which he tells of breaking 'mine early vow'. And when his diary reopens, only days after the completion of the poem that tells the story of a man losing his way and immersing himself in guilt and pleasure, Dodgson was confessing his first extant prayers of guilt to his God. And for the next few years poetry and private prayers continue to echo each other in a similarly intimate way. In life and art Dodgson seems to be telling the same story of a man tormented by his inability to keep himself from sin; a man who repeatedly invokes David's prayer for forgiveness: 'Make me a clean heart, oh God'. In his diaries he gives the sin no name – or at least only implies a name by the most attenuated referencing – but in his poetry he does. It is the sin of fornication; of guilty sexual love. Is this mere artistic exercise? Meaningless coincidence of life and art? Of course, it may be, and the myth has made anything else seem almost implausible, but if this were any man other than Carroll we would routinely allow the possibility his poetry is telling some kind of deeper truth.

The changed, newly depressive, freshly discursive diary voice that Dodgson presents on the other side of the four 'lost' years tells its own story. The alteration is profound. Aside from the sense of sin and depression there is a new edgy cynicism in his work. While his serious verse celebrated the passion and desire of love, he was also producing a new flow of bitterly humorous and knowing poems that mocked the same state. 'Ode to Damon', from 1861, makes fun of a woman who knows, with idiot certainty, that her lover adores her despite his obvious contempt. 'My Fancy', written in March 1862, only two months before 'Stolen Waters', could be its comic counterpart. With its sneer at the woman-turned-monster – 'she has the bear's ethereal grace, the bland hyena's laugh' – it is almost an anticipation of *Sylvie and Bruno's* 'my Lady', ludicrous in her bear costume but purring like a

cat. 'She's all my fancy painted her, but oh, how much besides!' The joke is the sexually rapacious, over-eager woman who is both absurd and desirable; a comic turn that is also an exciter of lust.²⁵

The pattern is repeated in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* itself, written, after all, in the very midst of this whole experience. Here the manipulations of would-be winsome or powerful women form one of the central recurring themes. Dodgson saw the Queen of Hearts as 'a sort of embodiment of ungovernable passion – a blind and aimless fury'. As such she is another early draft of 'my Lady', suggesting again the awful rapacity of the Circe-turned-monster. The Duchess is another hungry woman but coyly winning rather than demanding. She hooks her arm through Alice's and rests her 'sharp little chin' on the girl's shoulder as they walk around the garden together – like sisters or like lovers. Perhaps William Empson, the psychoanalyst, might have had a point for once when he observed: 'The obvious way to read it is as the middle-aged woman trying to flirt with the chaste young man.' The older woman clinging, clawing for affection, chin burrowing into her taller companion's shoulder as they stroll about the edges of the society croquet party; he irritated and withdrawn, perhaps furtively guilty, and she coaxing and entwining. 'You're thinking about something my dear, and that makes you forget to talk,' she says. 'I've a right to think,' snaps back her companion.²⁶

On 5 July 1862, the day after the first telling of the story of *Alice* to the children, he met the Liddells on Oxford railway station in an unexplained coincidental meeting that seems likely to have been prearranged, although he does not say so. He travelled down to London with them, and, probably under some pressure from the girls, he wrote out 'the headings' of the *Alice* story he had promised to put on paper. After this he promptly forgot all about it for the rest of the summer. He met up with the Liddells several more times during this stay in the city, always presumably by prearrangement, although, again, he never says so, and, unusually, his summer was troubled with episodes of the guilt he usually left behind in Oxford. He longed to 'get away', although he did not say from what, and 'begin, perhaps, a system of better habits and a holier life'.²⁷

When he left the family behind and travelled back home to Croft, his mood improved. But on 17 October, back in Oxford, he met Lorina and the

children 'out driving' (again he does not say if this was accidental or pre-planned) and concluded his account of the reunion with an anxious prayer. By this time additional troubles were looming. As we have seen in [Chapter 7](#), having taken his deacon's vows the previous December he was facing the absolute necessity of taking his priest's vows within twelve months of that time or he would be obliged to leave the college and his only source of income. He was in a desperately unstable state of mind over the question, resolving one day on 'preparation for the ministry' and the next to risk everything by rejecting the same. Like the character in 'Stolen Waters', he did not feel worthy of his vows and could not make himself take this next step into the priesthood.

Caught on the horns of an impossible dilemma, and desperate to find any way out that he could, he precipitated the crisis, as we have seen, when he visited Dean Liddell and told him solemnly that he thought himself exempt from becoming a priest because 'I consider mine as a lay Studentship'. This claim was the most insupportable nonsense and Liddell quickly dismissed it as such. In fact, he went further. As the two men faced one another in the Dean's study, Liddell told Dodgson that he had already forfeited his position at the college by failing to take his vows within the statutory four years of becoming an MA.

'I differed from this view,' observes Dodgson – although he must have known that Liddell was right – in words that hold more than a hint of unspoken animosity.²⁸ The men parted on the Dean's insistence that the Electors of the college must be consulted.

At this point, to all intents and purposes, Dodgson had already lost his job. The statutes of the college made it quite clear that failure to take full holy orders within the given time must result in immediate and unconditional dismissal from the ranks. Liddell was entirely correct in saying that he had to put the matter before the Electors and entirely correct in predicting that there could only be one outcome. Dodgson must have passed an anxious night, contemplating not only his own failure to honour his promise to his father and Pusey but also his ignominious loss of position and income.

But then, when Dodgson went to see the Dean again the next day, something had radically altered the Dean's mind, and he had made the

remarkable, and quite illegal, decision to let the matter drop. He told Dodgson that he had decided not to consult the Electors and indeed to take no further action in the matter. Almost incredibly, Dodgson was off the hook.

‘I consider myself free as to being ordained,’ he wrote in his diary,²⁹ and indeed he was, entirely illegally and entirely thanks to the extraordinary tolerance shown him by Dean Liddell. He remained in deacon’s orders only until the end of his life, the only Senior Student to be accorded such a privilege.

Of all the many puzzles and anomalies surrounding Dodgson’s relations with the Liddells this is possibly the strangest. Why would the Dean break the rules and possibly risk his own position for a man who was becoming his political opponent and was never a personal friend? It is an action that seems to speak of tactical manoeuvring. Liddell was, after all, first and foremost a skilful politician, one who did not give ground without good reason. There seems no possible incentive for him to take such covert trouble for Dodgson, unless he had reason to expect a lot more trouble to come from ejecting Dodgson than from allowing him to stay illegally. Did he fear that Dodgson, once dismissed from the college and a free agent, might exact some kind of revenge? He already had some cause to know the man could be a waspish satirist, who might not be averse to dishing a little delicately allusive dirt. Perhaps Liddell knew the wisdom of keeping your friends close and your enemies closer. Sadly, we can only speculate about precise motives. All we can say for sure is that there is a genuine puzzle here.

At about the same time as he was having these odd encounters with her husband Dodgson’s relationship with Mrs Liddell fell victim to one of its strange allusively referred-to events that he mentions only obliquely in his diary. On 28 October Dodgson visited Lorina, who was in mid-pregnancy at the time, to ask if he could send a local artist round to the Deanery in order to tint some of the photographs he had taken of the children. ‘But,’ says Dodgson, ‘she simply evaded the question,’ adding the elliptic observation: ‘I have been out of her good graces ever since Lord Newry’s business.’³⁰

This odd entry has always raised questions. What, after all, does Dodgson mean by the expression ‘out of her good graces’? He certainly is not referring to any social exclusion, since he was still welcome into her

home and still allowed to act in a quasi-parental way with her children. He still holds, in fact, a very special position within the family. His reference, therefore, hints at an alteration to some other, presumably undisclosed, aspect of their relationship. During some unrecorded meetings bad blood has occurred between them over something. What, biographers have sometimes wondered, is that likely to have been? What was 'Lord Newry's business', and what did it have to do with Dodgson's relationship with Lorina Liddell?

For some time it has been assumed that the second part of this question was answered. The biographer Anne Clark was told by the Librarian at Christ Church about some documentation from a Governing Body meeting that discussed a petition to hold a summer ball in 1862 that was apparently refused. Dodgson did indeed make passing reference to such a ball on 25 May of that year, when he 'talked with Lord Newry about the difficulty the College are in about the ball', adding 'the two parties cannot agree on the rules, and I fear much ill-feeling will result'. This conjunction of Newry's name with the mention of the ball persuaded Clark that she may have found the answer to the puzzle of 'Lord Newry's business'. She suggested Newry wanted to hold the ball, Mrs Liddell supported him and Dodgson was opposed. But there are problems with this. According to Clark herself there was nothing on the document she saw to indicate that 'the ball' involved any dispute between Newry, Dodgson or Mrs Liddell, or even suggest that they were directly involved in it at all.³¹ I have been unable to confirm this myself, since the relevant document seems to have become another victim of the chaotic Christ Church archive, and my attempts to uncover it have been met with the assurance that it is not there and never was. But, since Dodgson was still quite junior and not even a member of the Governing Body in 1862, he could hardly have been involved in a college decision to have or not to have a summer ball, and the evidence of Dodgson's own journal doesn't really support such an idea. It's pretty clear from his description of 'talk[ing] with Lord Newry about the difficulty the College are in about the ball' seems to suggest that, while this ball may have been causing a schism in the college, he and Newry were not on opposing sides and possibly were not even involved at all. The mystery, long thought solved, is apparently still a mystery.

If 'Lord Newry's business' was not the summer ball, then what was it? Why did it put Dodgson out of Lorina's 'good graces'? And, moreover, why does it lie in the strange hinterland of Dodgson's diary world, where the most personal things are unexplained and undeveloped, just dimly and patchily lit by allusion? Until further documentation comes to light we can only speculate. Is the episode likely to be connected with the fact that the Liddells had just spent the summer in North Wales, staying close to Lord Newry's estates there? Had Lorina perhaps begun to favour Newry over Dodgson in some way, and was this the meaning behind the reference to being 'out of her good graces' over the 'business'?

Interestingly, Violet Dodgson, the woman who cut out some of the pages from Dodgson's diary, was equally curious, although only very privately, about this reference to Newry. At the bottom of the little paper on which she summarized the contents of the crucial missing page of 27 June 1863, before snipping it into oblivion, she wrote:

Does any one know what the business with Lord Newry was that put L.C. out of Mrs Liddell's good graces?³²

The fact she raises this matter at this time implies she sees a connection between that obscure event and the material she was removing. Perhaps in that missing entry Dodgson mentioned something about Newry (who was with them on the river on that fateful June day) that called the 'business' to mind.

How long Dodgson remained out of Lorina's 'good graces', whatever he meant by that, is not possible to determine. When the girls were sent off to stay with their paternal grandparents at Hetton Lawn, near Cheltenham, in the March of 1863, Dodgson, who was to be staying close by on business of his own, arranged to visit them there and kept them entertained in what was probably a rather elderly and restrictive household. The girls had been sent away because Lorina was pregnant and in need of some rest. She gave birth to her third son in late March or early April. At around the same time Dodgson, back in Oxford, became freshly besieged by a wave of guilt: 'on my knees I beseech Almighty God to help me put away my old sins & lead a new life', he wrote on 31 March, repeating the invocation the next day with an 'Amen'.³³ Perhaps to distract himself, he took himself on one of his jaunts

to London, visited the studio of the great photographer Oscar Rejlander and had his photograph taken. London was an important refuge to him throughout this period. He was beginning to make his way in the artistic world there, and the society of such bohemians as Rossetti perhaps offered an escape from his own sense of inner judgement. He was almost always less guilty there; less guilty everywhere but Oxford.

The Liddells' new baby fell ill towards the end of May, and Dodgson noted the fact in his diary: 'There is great alarm about the baby at the Deanery.' He and the children walked around Christ Church Meadow, 'grave and nearly silent, a great contrast to yesterday's walk'. To distract the children, and perhaps to relieve the anxious mother of the added burden of their presence, Dodgson took the three girls on the river that afternoon and returned them to the Deanery to hear the optimistic news: 'rather better report of the baby'.³⁴

It proved to be false optimism, however. The little boy died two days later on 28 May. Some time after this, although typically he does not say when or why, Dodgson seems to have returned to Mrs Liddell's 'good graces'. There was something of a carnival atmosphere building up as the university began its preparations for the visit of the newly married Prince and Princess of Wales, and Dodgson's contact with the family seems to have been infected with this holiday mood. On 9 June he took the children on a river outing and enjoyed himself. 'Mark this day with a white stone,' he told his diary – his personal terminology for a special or pleasant experience. Three days later, however, there was a strongly contrasting entry. This time there is no description of his whereabouts or what has happened to him, just the bare words:

Not all days are to be marked with white stones. Collections are over, and vacation (in a way) begun: and tonight on my knees I pray God to give me a new heart, that here, at this milestone on my way, I may begin a new life. Help me, oh God, for Christ's sake. Amen.³⁵

He has been reminded of the other side of himself – the dark, sense of nameless sin. By this time Dodgson had been occupying his unreal position of pseudo-'Papa' or quasi-big brother within the Liddell household for at least twelve months, and probably, allowing for the missing volumes of his

diary, for far longer. It was a position that was probably fundamentally untenable in the social climate of the time. Gossip and misunderstanding would be rife and building – as indeed we now know they were. His constant visits to the Deanery would be noticed and speculated on. Was he a suitor? What, indeed, was his role? But it seems that the participants chose to ignore this fact for as long as possible, even at some risk to their reputations. They were indeed inhabiting a ‘foolish time’, as Dodgson himself later described it, and were apparently blind to certain realities. The situation with Ina, the eldest daughter, exemplifies the almost crazily unconventional nature of his relationship with the family and how it carried within it the seed of its own destruction.

In the autumn of 1862 Dodgson had commented that Ina probably would not be allowed into his company unchaperoned much longer, since she was rising fourteen. But this was a prophecy that remained unfulfilled. Ina was still one of ‘the three’ by the time of her fourteenth birthday. From time to time, as the girl grew so undeniably ‘tall’ (a euphemism Dodgson used more than once for sexual maturity), Lorina the mother made fitful stipulations about chaperones, but they were only sometimes enforced, and for the most part she continued to waive these social rules month after month, even while Dodgson was ‘out of her good graces’. Somewhat inexplicably she continued to confer on him many of the latitudes and privileges of a father or uncle or older brother. She was probably distracted, certainly emotionally vulnerable after the recent death of her baby, and she was already pregnant again, perhaps nauseous, tired, glad of this young man being there to take a little responsibility for her girls, keeping them entertained and out of her hair. And she was used to doing as she pleased, defying authority, unused to taking the consequences. For his part, Dodgson willingly continued to take the privileges she offered. It was a situation that could not endure. The very public position that they all occupied, the involvement of the children, who would talk as guilelessly as children always do, combined to mean that the Liddells’ Oxford empire, their social standing and everything that Lorina and the Dean himself had worked for were in a delicate and vulnerable condition. Perhaps Liddell, distracted by his work and college affairs, had failed to be aware of how *outré* the situation had

become. If so, the next curious little event in the saga probably changed all of that in a major way.

On 15 June 1863 Dodgson was at the Deanery preparing an album of his photographs for the attention of the royal couple – he never missed a chance for some career advancement – when a letter came from Ina and the other girls who were preparing a stall for the St John's College bazaar that was opening the next day. They were evidently feeling slightly out of their depth and 'begging' for help. Dodgson accordingly went to see what was needed and worked from three in the afternoon until nearly seven in the evening 'putting up cards, arranging etc.'

On the following day he was again *in loco parentis* at the bazaar and showing some signs of wear. After he had helped the children set up their stall and tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the Princess of Wales to buy one of the kittens they were selling 'suddenly the Bazaar opened & the place filled with a dense mob' and every parent or guardian's horror occurred: three-year-old Rhoda went missing.

I set out to hunt her up, with Edith, who insisted on coming too, & after some time spied her out in a stall: I begged them to hand her over to me, & carrying her & pushing Edith, I fought my way down the whole Bazaar, through a tremendous crush, back to their stall.³⁶

After a whole afternoon of such responsibility he had had enough. He sent the girls home on their own in a fly and went off for some adult society at the college banquet. But what did the assembled Oxford high society make of this man, harassed as any young father, shepherding another man's family about as if it was his own?

On the 25th, and apparently on a whim, Lorina sent Alice and Edith to fetch Dodgson to the Deanery so that they could make arrangements for a trip on the river, and at three o'clock a large party set out downriver to Nuneham. It was a curious expedition: the middle-aged Dean and his elderly father, who must have seemed more than a little out of place on the river; Lorina with billowing crinoline and four children in tow; and three young bachelors – Dodgson himself, the mysteriously 'involved' Viscount Newry and a fellow Senior Student of Dodgson's called Vernon Harcourt. The three young men did most of the rowing, and they must have been in

good shape to have hauled this combined weight all the way to Nuneham, even with the current in their favour. There was tea under the trees, after which, apparently, no one had much inclination for a return journey upstream, so Dodgson took the children home by train while everyone else returned by carriage. That evening he dined with Harcourt at the Clarendon Hotel.³⁷

Two days later he wrote to Lorina suggesting a photographic session with the children. But, unknown to him, something seems to have occurred since she had last seen him. Since the trip to Nuneham Lorina had become suddenly troubled about gossip. The page on which Dodgson recorded this crisis has, of course, become the most famous missing page in his diary. We only know anything about what he wrote there because of the discovery of the ‘cut pages in diary’ document. This tatty little page, torn out of an account book and written in the hand of Dodgson’s niece, Violet, was unearthed by myself completely accidentally in 1996. It looks no more glamorous than a shopping list, but its significance is considerable. It is evidently very private, never intended to find its way into a public archive, and it contains brief summaries of three pages from Dodgson’s diaries. Violet seemingly wrote it as a personal *aide-mémoire* of material she and her sister Menella were intending to cut out, and, in fact, two of the three pages referred to are now missing while the third is still there but heavily crossed out. The most important entry of the three on this little page is the second, headed ‘Vol. 8, page 92’, because this is the missing page, the one for 27–29 June 1863, long assumed to have been about some aspect of Dodgson’s assumed passion for Alice Liddell. Here, on this little, scruffy document, Violet had written a one-sentence summary of what that page had really contained:

Vol. 8 Page 92. L.C. learns from Mrs Liddell that he is supposed to be using the children as a means of paying court to the governess – He is also supposed [unreadable] to be courting Ina.³⁸

‘L.C.’ is, of course, Dodgson. As he says in his last diary entry before the break, he ‘wrote to Mrs Liddell’ with a suggestion that she send the children over to be photographed. This document shows that on the same day, or soon after, he either received a reply or spoke to Lorina in person. She told

him that there was damaging gossip circulating about his continued visits to the Deanery. Gossip involving 'the governess' and 'Ina'. The summary is cryptic and brief, Dodgson's original diary entry is likely to have been much longer. The remaining quarter-inch of cut stump where the page once was shows no evidence of horizontal lines ruled on the page. Dodgson used such horizontal rulings to separate his daily entries, and their absence suggests that, although the missing page spans the dates 27–29 June, it probably contained only a single entry covering one day – 27 June. This isn't unusual. Dodgson frequently skipped days, often several days in succession, when filling in his diary. But what is significant is the apparent length of the missing entry. This single day takes up an entire page and was obviously considerably longer and more detailed than the brief one-sentence résumé we have today in the 'cut pages in diary' document.

'The governess' is Mary Prickett, a very homely woman whose name had been linked to Dodgson's some years before, to his evident incredulity.³⁹ 'Ina' is of course the pet name of Alice's older sister Lorina (named after her mother), who was fourteen and therefore of marriageable age in the summer of 1863. Dodgson had been commenting for some time that she seemed too 'tall' to be accompanying him on unchaperoned river trips, but, somehow, the trips had continued. Was this gossip the fall-out from this excessive leniency? Very likely, but confusion arises from the fact the sister shared her name with her mother. Much depends on Dodgson's original wording, which is now lost to us. If the original indeed unambiguously used the name 'Ina' then it was undoubtedly the daughter being referred to, and this was surely bad enough. But if by chance the wording has become blurred and the original name used was 'Lorina', or 'LL' or some such – meaning the mother – then the gossip, even if groundless, was potentially disastrous. I have found no record of any such gossip connecting Dodgson with Lorina Liddell, but the possibility that it was she is given some added weight by the author Morton Cohen, who told me he had uncovered some contemporary rumour linking Dodgson and Mrs Liddell at this time. If this is so, and the gossip Lorina told Dodgson about referred not to a possible courtship of her daughter but a possible indiscretion with Lorina herself, it might explain the extreme nature of the subsequent behaviour on both sides.

After receiving this news about the gossip Dodgson did not visit the Liddell home again for *six months*; he also apparently ‘held aloof’ from them in public for the whole of the autumn term. The period of enforced absence was, we know, a troubled time for Dodgson. He was guilty, and he was restless. He spent his summer periodically asking for strength to ‘leave my old life behind’ and ‘amend’. And, as the time approached for his return to Oxford, this anxiety intensified. ‘Tomorrow week I leave here – Oh that tomorrow might begin a new life for me, leaving my old life & sins for ever behind,’ he wrote on 21 September.⁴⁰

On the 29th he travelled down to London to stay with the sculptor Alexander Munro and to do some society photography. He spent some days calling on Rossetti and Holman-Hunt before settling down to the serious business of taking portraits of these and other celebrities and various families of children. As usual in this cosmopolitan and tolerant society he forgot his sense of sin, but as soon as he left London behind and returned to Oxford it was back.

He returned on the evening of 14 October. Two days later his diary contains the single observation ‘met the Liddells’, without further comment, and three days after that he asks God once again to help him ‘amend my life, for Christ’s sake’. Since he later claimed to have ‘held aloof’ from Lorina and her children ‘all this term’, the little entry ‘met the Liddells’ seems anomalous. Did he encounter them in the street without speaking? Or does it indicate that he was seeing them somehow privately and only ‘holding aloof’ from them in public? The fact that he observed on 19 December that ‘I have seen nothing of them (to speak of) for nearly six months’ does nothing much to support or dismiss either possibility. He continued to be troubled throughout the rest of this term, longing to leave behind his ‘sins and weaknesses’, asking ‘the merciful God’ to assist him, that ‘my preaching may not be a hollow mockery, my words leading others to good works and myself a castaway’. ‘Oh that I could rouse myself from my life of dead works to serve the living God!’ he wrote on 7 November.⁴¹

He recorded no more encounters with Mrs Liddell or her children until 5 December. On this day he went to the college theatricals and saw a few plays including *Alfred the Great*. He remarked jovially that ‘Baring [an undergraduate] looked very well as a lady’, but there was no sense of fun

about the final sentence in the entry: 'Mrs Liddell and the children were there, but I held aloof from them as I have done all this term.' Two days later he filled an entire entry with this warning to himself:

Exactly a month ago I find a prayer for grace to lead a better life. I now repeat that prayer, and pray also that with this dying year may die out my old life in me, and that the new year may bring holier and better things.⁴²

For a few days he was distractedly busy on the end-of-term assessments, 'Collections', that he had to prepare for each of his students. But when the rush of work was over his theme of anxiety returned: 'Oh God help me to begin a holier and better life!' he confided on 16 December. The next day his brief journal entry begins with two unadorned sentences: 'Wrote to offer to go over to the Deanery. Visit put off till Saturday.'

He went there that Saturday, and after spending a happy evening informs his diary that 'the Dean was away'. Is this the reason why the visit had been postponed two days? To ensure that Henry Liddell, who might have been less than sanguine about the man's return to his drawing-room, was not there to complain? Whether this is so or not, Dodgson enjoyed what may have been one of his last entirely joyous times with the family. 'The nominal reason for my going was to play croquet, but it never came to that, music, talk etc. occupying the whole of a very pleasant evening.' Mrs Liddell was there 'part of the time'. She would have been about six months pregnant. He had his dinner there and marked the day with a white stone.⁴³ Three days later he left Oxford for Croft and Christmas with his real family.

His visit to the Deanery had seemed almost like a return to the old days, but the 'foolish time' that Dodgson wrote to Lorina about so many years later was already drawing to a close. The June crisis, whatever its precise cause, had brought the real world rushing in. Gossip and watching eyes were everywhere. It was no longer possible to deceive themselves into thinking that it could 'last for ever'. And the political situation between him and the Dean began to reach a crisis of its own, making any overt social contact between him and Henry Liddell's family more problematic than ever.

On 19 January, a month exactly after his 'white stone day' at the Deanery, Dodgson read in *The Times* about Liddell's plans regarding six new Junior Studentships that were to be awarded in February. Liddell decided,

apparently arbitrarily, that one of these new posts would be given to the candidate that 'shows the greatest proficiency in mathematics'. Dodgson thought that this unilateral decision deliberately ignored 'the rights of the Electors to choose the one whom they think most fit in all respects' and thus began a correspondence that can be seen in some ways to be another skirmish in the confrontation between rebel Students and Dean and Chapter that would burst into the open later that year. Since his post of Mathematical Lecturer would oblige him to act as assessor for Liddell's chosen system, Dodgson felt he had no choice but to lodge a formal objection, and in a series of letters he challenged Liddell's right to conduct the selection in the autocratic manner he chose. Liddell replied with obvious irritation that 'the Notice must stand for the present time as it is. There really is no need to alter it. I am responsible for it.' Dodgson in turn replied that he could not act as assessor for Liddell unless he did alter the terms of the Notice, and this, wrote Dodgson 'brought our rather disagreeable correspondence to an end'.⁴⁴

It was a statement that brought previously covert hostility out into the open, and there was no drawing back from it. As the political relationship between dons and Dean worsened it became increasingly difficult for Dodgson to have any formal social contact with Liddell's wife and children at all. Instead, he met the girls in a series of 'accidental' encounters, out walking in Christ Church Meadow or elsewhere. In March 1864 Lorina's baby girl was born. She was named Violet Constance. Dodgson noted the fact of her birth in his journal without additional comment. In May he asked if he could take Alice, Edith and Rhoda on the river, but Lorina told him she could not allow such latitudes any more. 'Rather superfluous caution', Dodgson wrote laconically in his diary.⁴⁵

After his confrontation with the Dean and the virtual disappearance of Lorina and her children from his diary, Dodgson's personal pain and sense of guilt only increased. Over the next two years, in fits and starts, with moments of improvement in between, he sank ever deeper into his depression. Suicidal thoughts had emerged in his poetry for some time, and the themes recur enough for the possibility to be a real one that in his blackest moments Dodgson contemplated taking his own life. The desperate

weariness of 'For myself I am utterly weak & vile & selfish ... O deliver me from the Chains of Sin' sounds real enough and bitter enough.

The hugely significant confrontation of the winter of 1864–5 between the rebel Senior Students, and the Dean and Chapter goes all but unrecorded in Dodgson's diary, although we know he was one of Thomas Prout's right-hand men and an important force in the progress of the rebellion. It is as if such things did not signify for him at the time. He was, of course, taken up with readying his *Alice* story for publication and with the sheer pressure of his teaching job, but even so it is as if depression was beginning to turn him inwards with new force. His periods of self-loathing become more bitter than any he had ever known before, but it is difficult to assess what link this had with the Dean's family – if any. His continued guilt may indicate continued contact, but his own absolute silence about any possible cause for his worsening sense of sin means that we cannot truly know. Perhaps there were other things in his life – relationships or forms of indulgence that we know nothing about. It is a dark area where Dodgson is at his most allusive and facts are few.

Anne Thackeray, daughter of the great novelist and author in her own right, seems to have met him at around this time under circumstances that are slightly odd in themselves. Their first recorded encounter, in 1869, is presumably not actually their first, since Thackeray had already embarked on her *roman-à-clef*, *From an Island*, in which Dodgson apparently figures and which is set around a meeting between them on the Isle of Wight, presumably in the early 1860s. The young man she describes, the photographer George Hexham, is identified as 'Lewis Carroll' in the author's own copy of the book. If this identity is correct – and there seems no reason to doubt it – then Thackeray's work gives us a rare, if not unique, glimpse of the Dodgson of this era from a viewpoint other than his own. In this brief drama Thackeray portrays a driven, rather cynical figure ('a little hard' and full of 'youthful strength and power') ⁴⁶ who – most interestingly – thinks the innocent Hester (heroine of the story) might provide him with his 'salvation' (Thackeray does not say from what), who claims to love her and yet plays her off against an older woman. It is a picture quite shockingly removed from any familiar mythic image of 'Carroll', and thus has tended to be ignored. Yet in many particulars, most especially its edgy cynicism and

conscious pursuit of 'salvation', it is considerably closer to his own contemporary self-knowledge than the portrait of cloying or deviant sweetness that now passes for reality. The self-consciously sardonic jokes about Wordsworth's virtue also have echoes in Dodgson's own autobiographical writing. Dodgson satirized Wordsworth's pompous moralizing in the White Knight's song and explained his reasons for doing so thus:

Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence' is a poem that has always amused me a good deal ... by the absurd way in which the poet goes on questioning the poor old leech-gatherer, making him tell his history over and over again, and never attending to what he says. Wordsworth ends with a moral – an example I have *not* followed.⁴⁷

In hauntingly similar tones, Thackeray describes her Hexham lounging in the drawing-room after dinner, filled with a hard-edged *esprit moqueur* and being almost deliberately offensive: "I hate Wordsworth. He is always preaching," said Hexham ... "I never feel so wicked as when I am being preached at."⁴⁸

Even if we balk at accepting any biographical reality to the story of his love affair with 'Hester', Thackeray's portrait of 'Lewis Carroll' is such a vivid evocation we can't afford to ignore it as it has been so consistently ignored.

In the summer of 1866 Dodgson sank into his deepest depression yet, and one gets the sense that he felt unable to go on much longer in this vein. 'My heart is very heavy,' he wrote, 'I resolve & pray, but seem to beat the air.' But then, with the impossible timing of a Hollywood cavalry charge, another of those allusively recorded 'happenings' occurred that he once again thought might free him for ever from his sinful life – and this time he seems to have been right. When, only twelve days later he thanked God for his deliverance, this time it was indeed a turning point. Whether this latest 'event' was some form of inner resolution, a decisive meeting or something he thought of as a message of deliverance from the Saviour he so truly believed in, it was, for him, a real moment of epiphany that he marked in his own ever-elliptic way: 'I thank God for grace & strength given me, & pray Him to pardon my sins, & help me serve Him better. For Jesus' sake, Amen.'⁴⁹

After this he never returned to those depths of despair and slowly he began to climb out of the pit and back into the light.

A few months later, in December 1866, he dined at the Deanery and described the evening, perhaps significantly, as 'one of the pleasantest evenings I have had there for a very long time'. He sat next to Ina at the dining-table and 'had a good deal of talk with Mrs Liddell & (*mirabile dictu!*) a long chat with Mrs Reeve. Mrs Liddell told me about Mrs Schuster, & showed me some very pretty new photographs of the children.'

Normal social relations are apparently being resumed. He and Lorina make small talk to one another, and even Mrs Reeve, Lorina's mother, who never liked him (for reasons he never confides), unbends enough to talk to him in public. This tentative new situation persisted and eventually became the norm. In May 1867 he 'paid a visit to Mrs Liddell and had a long chat with her, walking about the Deanery garden – a thing I have not done in years'.⁵⁰ It has the sound of resolution and relief about it, of some crisis being resolved and forgotten, of enough emotional distance for pleasantries to take a hold. But, as ever, we are left with nothing but guesswork to fill in the obvious blanks in the information he is providing. It is curious, for example, that he records not having walked and talked with Lorina 'in years' – since it means he had been wont to do this in the past, yet never actually recorded any instance of it in his diary. He and Mrs Liddell, strolling among the roses, like Alice and the Duchess. Why was this among the inadmissible images for him?

A year after this little moment in the Deanery garden Dodgson wrote his final confessional love poem, 'The Valley of the Shadow of Death', about a man who has finally learned to put sin behind him. Whatever the darkness in his life had been, it seems to have been lifting. But can we possibly deduce what it was or why it left? The legend of the 'real Alice', and Cohen's passionate re-evocation of it, would suggest it was all to do with the Dean's second daughter, Alice Pleasance Liddell. It is a possibility that needs to be looked at carefully.

The Unreal Alice

No one knows what Alice really felt as a child for ‘Mr Dodgson’, though some have filled in the gap in a spirit of sentimental Alice-olatry, partly perhaps because they confuse Alice and ‘Alice’ ... or simply because they hope it was like that. – Colin Gordon, *Beyond the Looking-Glass*

THE history of Charles Dodgson’s involvement with the Liddell family has traditionally been told as if it was almost exclusively the history of his involvement with the second daughter, Alice. The impression is given that he favoured her massively over her sisters, worshipped her, courted her. With our modern love of literalism we have interpreted his ‘Alice’ as the real-life Alice he knew when he wrote the story. We confuse their separate identities in Jungian, suggestive ways. Biographers write things like: ‘Alice Liddell, the little girl who was the heroine of Wonderland ... moved into the Deanery at Christ Church on 25th February 1856’; they caption the Tenniel drawing of Alice on the mantelpiece as ‘Alice going through the looking glass at Hetton Lawn, her grandmother’s house near Cheltenham.’¹ To us, ‘Alice’ and Alice Liddell are synonymous. The consensus in modern biography is that Alice Liddell was the ‘dreamchild’ and, beyond that, the key to Dodgson’s inner mind, his muse, the love of his life – the cipher by which we read his soul.

Was he in love with this girl whose name he immortalized? Is it this unrequited passion that lies at the heart of his curious relationship with her family? Individual biographers have long been certain the answer was an unqualified ‘yes’, but beyond their certitude the situation is at best ambiguous. While Dodgson’s diaries remained unpublished it was widely assumed that they would one day be shown to contain plentiful evidence of his passion for the girl. But, when they were finally published, they simply didn’t. Therein were no protestations of love, no tales of marriage proposals,

virtually nothing, in fact, to distinguish Alice from her older and younger sister. For sure, Dodgson said he loved her, but he said the same about Ina and Edith, too. He seemed to love ‘the children,’ as he often called them at this time, in the way a father, stepfather, or uncle might.

The absence of evidence for anything more is so total that after half a lifetime of research Cohen, a convinced believer in Alice Liddell as the ‘dreamchild,’ has managed to discover only two pieces of documentation that can be claimed to offer it any corroboration at all. One is the fragment of rumour we looked at earlier, that dates from the late 1870s, when Alice Liddell was twenty-six and had long ceased to be a child. The other is a cryptic reference in Dodgson’s diary to someone he calls ‘A.L.’

The rumour, repeated by Lord Salisbury in a slightly jokey aside in a private letter, suggested Dodgson had recently asked for the ‘real Alice’s’ hand, had been refused and ‘gone out of his mind’. As we have seen, Cohen makes quite a bit of this, even rather dishonestly back-referring it fifteen years to fit in with his theory of a marriage proposal when Alice was eleven. But even if we do not balk at using a rumour from 1878 to back a story about 1863, this is a fragile piece of evidence. After all, similar rumours circulated at different times about Alice’s governess and her older and younger sisters. Do we accept them all as ‘evidence’ and conclude that Dodgson enjoyed at least four separate liaisons with different members of the family circle?

The other piece of firsthand evidence Cohen has been able to find (aside from his general and allusive claims of certitude) is the entry in Dodgson’s journal for 17 October 1866 concerning ‘A.L.’:

On Saturday Uncle S. dined with me, & on Sunday I dined with him at the Randolph, & on each occasion we had a good deal of conversation about Wilfred, & about A.L. – it is a very anxious subject.²

Wilfred was Dodgson’s younger brother, who was causing his family some embarrassment at the time in various ways. He was at that time courting a young girl, aged fifteen, and he had no job and no money and was therefore in no position to offer a formal proposal. His family were worried about potential indiscretions in this volatile situation, and Charles even suggested Wilfred went abroad for a while to calm the situation down. This

is, at least in part, what Dodgson and his uncle discussed over their dinner. But who was 'A.L.'? What did he or she have to do with it? And what was the 'anxious subject' Dodgson, so typically, refers to without defining?

The most obvious explanation is perhaps a slip of the pen. The girl Wilfred was courting was named Alice Donkin, suggesting that Dodgson, in a momentary slip, had mistakenly written 'A.L.' instead of 'A.D.' This would also most easily explain what the 'anxious subject' was – the love affair between Alice and Wilfred. For others, like Cohen, it is much more likely that 'A.L.' is Alice Liddell, and this cryptic entry is some kind of admission on Dodgson's part of his love for her. But we have to ask why? By 1866 he had virtually ceased seeing Alice Liddell or mentioning her in his diaries. Why should we assume he would suddenly be discussing his supposed love for her with his uncle Skeffington? And why – even more to the point – would he combine this issue with the problems Wilfred was facing and refer to them as a single 'anxious subject'? Cohen suggests it was because both girls were teenagers called Alice.³ But this seems to put too much strain on credulity. It might all be more plausible if Dodgson had been in the habit of referring to Alice Liddell as 'A.L.' or if there were some other reason for assuming he had wanted to marry her in 1866. But Dodgson never uses the initials 'A.L.' to refer to Alice anywhere else, and, as we've seen, there simply isn't any other contemporary evidence for a romance at all. Given that, the 'A.L.' remains little more than an anomaly. Proof positive of a love affair it simply isn't.

One other piece of evidence routinely offered in support of the Alice/Dodgson story is by no means firsthand, but is still deserving of consideration. It is the strange self-serving letter referred to earlier, written by Stuart Collingwood to his cousin Menella in February 1932. The date is significant. The centenary celebrations of Lewis Carroll's birth were cranking up. The legend of Alice Liddell as 'dreamchild' and object of desire was beginning to take shape, and the family was beginning to be pestered for information more urgently than ever before. In the midst of this, Menella, who as keeper of the family papers was at the centre of this unwanted attention, wrote to Collingwood asking for some biographical information, possibly with a view to making a public statement in the press. What, she wanted to know, had happened to the four missing volumes of the diary?

Was there any truth in the newspaper rumours then circulating connecting Dodgson romantically with, first, the actress Ellen Terry and, second, various members of the Liddell family? And what had Collingwood meant by his reference in his biography to the autobiographical ‘shadow of disappointment’ that lay over his uncle’s love poetry?

Collingwood’s reply was, in part at least, an absolute lie. He claimed never to have had the ‘complete diary’, which, of course, he had, and his response to the other inquiries seems to have been every bit as disingenuous:

Nothing I have read in L.C.’s diaries or letters, suggested – to the best of my memory – that he had ever had any affaires de cœur ... I think that Aunt Fanny once told me that it was the family’s opinion that Uncle Charles had had a disappointment in love, & that they also thought (or she also thought) that the lady in question was Ellen Terry ... The ‘shadow’ I hinted at had no other basis than what I had heard from Aunt Fanny.

He is pretty obviously backtracking and trying very hard to assure his cousin that he knows nothing about any possible love affair. Given his previous observations about the ‘shadow of disappointment’ in his uncle’s life, and given the fact he had very likely destroyed four volumes of his uncle’s diary that covered precisely the period of this ‘shadow’, we can assume his pleas of ignorance are probably bogus. He simply doesn’t want to have to tell his cousin Menella anything he might know. This probability is emphasized by the fact that Collingwood suddenly drew a metaphorical and physical line across his narrative and abruptly changed his tack. Come to think of it – he did know about Lewis Carroll’s love life after all, and, lo and behold, those rumours in the newspapers about Ellen Terry and Alice Liddell were pretty much right after all! And in the stroke of a pen the man who *thought* his Aunt Fanny *might* have said something once became the man who knew almost everything:

When Ellen Terry was just growing up – about 17 – she was lovely beyond description (I have seen a photo of her, which belonged to L.C., at about that age), and it is highly probable that he fell in love with her; he may even have proposed to her.

But this was not the only passion in Dodgson’s life. Collingwood had suddenly remembered another one as well:

Whereas, in regard to the Liddells, it was Alice who was undoubtedly his pet, and it was his intense love for her (though she was only a child) which pulled the trigger and released his genius. Indeed it is quite likely that Alice's marriage to Hargreaves may have seemed to him the greatest tragedy of his life.⁴

Biographers have wisely tended to dismiss most of this bizarrely self-contradictory and self-serving account, and it is described even by the gentle and kindly Derek Hudson as 'not entirely reliable'. But some writers, gripped by the myth, try to make an exception for the Alice part, suggesting that Collingwood's 'speculation about the Alice affair is more to the point'.⁵ Is there any real justification for such an exception? Collingwood's claim that he never had the complete diary is untrue. The claim about a proposal to Ellen Terry is lifted straight from newspaper stories circulating at the time and is, as Cohen himself pointed out, 'out of the question', since the woman was married before Dodgson even met her. The claim about Alice Liddell is lifted from exactly the same romanticized sources and is supported by almost no independent evidence at all. In what sense is it 'more to the point'? Aren't both these ladies offered up by Collingwood as a rather lame kind of afterthought? Something to give Menella so she will stop pestering him with questions? It is not Collingwood baring his or his uncle's soul; it is Collingwood being highly economical with the truth, saying what he wants others to believe. Almost certainly he knew more about Dodgson's 'affaires de cœur' than anyone else alive. But equally certainly he had decided long ago to say nothing about what he knew. He had stated publicly that there was nothing to be gained by 'lifting the veil' on Dodgson's private pain and the 'shadow' that afflicted him. Whole chunks of his uncle's diary had been removed – probably by this same Collingwood – in order to conceal something even from other members of the family, and this letter of his continues the process of concealment and dissimulation. If the text suggests anything beyond simple convenience-thinking, it is that he would not have been prepared to use either the Terry or the Alice story if they had been connected in any way to the aspects of Dodgson's life he had chosen to keep behind the 'veil'.

In summary, it is pretty clear the evidential basis for the assumptions long made about Carroll and the 'real Alice' is slim at best. There are no letters or diary entries claiming his passionate adoration of Alice Liddell or

his desire to marry her, no contemporary evidence of unconditional devotion. There are only three or four even vaguely significant references to her by name throughout the period of his closest involvement with her family, and two of these are fairly unflattering. There is no evidence, either *prima facie* or secondary, cryptic or elliptic, to seriously suggest he proposed to the eleven-year-old girl or even considered doing so. After thirty years of searching Cohen can find no more to say in support of his own belief that 'Charles, aged 31, proposed marriage to Alice, aged 11' than to claim 'Oxford gossip had it so'.⁶ But even this fragile rationale is untrue. Oxford gossip did not have it so. Nothing and no one ever had it so – except Cohen and his fellow biographers. Meanwhile the 'cut pages in diary' document has shown that many of the assumptions made on this subject by biographers have been very wide of the mark. It might be time to recognize the need to change the assumptions to fit in with the facts as we now have them.

At seven Alice Liddell was, perhaps, as he later said, his 'ideal child-friend'. But it was a brief role for her. By the early 1860s, when he first told the story of Alice's adventures to the 'children three' in the boat, her special status was probably already beginning to fade. She did – and posterity has to be grateful to her for that – ask him to write the story down, after he first told it, and he did promise to do so, but the image of him sitting up that night, writing by candlelight, is pure legend. His diary tells a different story. The Liddell girls loved 'Alice's adventures', but he was less impressed. Sometimes their demand for the 'interminable' tale irked him, and he wanted to do other things. On one river trip that summer he sang them a comic song of his creation, 'Miss Jones', and was a little peeved when they were more interested in continuing the 'interminable' tale of Alice.⁷ He had no intimation of genius or immortality, no mystic visitation from his muse. Only in later years would he relight this bumpy reality in the soft glow of pure middle-aged nostalgia. Then he reminisced in soft focus in the pages of *The Theatre* about how he had produced his masterpiece as an unselfish gift 'for a child I loved' while floating gently down the stream. 'I cannot remember any other motive,' he says – which perhaps speaks more for his own convenient amnesia (and a lifelong capacity for gentle sophistry) than for any actual truth.⁸

Even when Alice asked him to write the story down, he was half-hearted in his response. He was preoccupied with other things – his burgeoning artistic career, his London friends, the looming problem of the priesthood, the sense of sin that haunted him. She asked him to write it down, he said he would, but in his usual manner he did not get round to it. Only a chance meeting with the Liddell girls in the quad, four months later on 13 November, rescued his promise, and his story, from oblivion.⁹ He started work on it that evening, probably with a little shiver of guilt at the delay. It must be open to question how much he could even remember of that initial summer tale so long after the event, yet no one has ever wondered just how much of the ‘Underground’ book was ever actually created on that famous ‘golden afternoon’ and how much simply got born through desperation over a winter in Dodgson’s study.

It took another two years of intermittent labour to finish the book and, somewhere along the way, getting it ready for Alice began to take second place to finding a publisher for what he began to realize was a potentially commercial story. The entrepreneur in him came to the fore. He had always wanted to think of a book that would ‘sell well’, and now he had he was determined to make the most of it. He began adapting and extending the story, turning it from *Underground* into *Wonderland*, and somehow Alice’s little gift got forgotten for some time. It took him until September 1864 to finish the drawings in her book and another two months after that for him to deliver the finished work to her. By this time she had waited *twenty-eight months* for her little gift, and the manuscript he had written supposedly *for* her had been passed round to his writer-friend George MacDonald, to Tenniel the illustrator, to his publisher Macmillan and even to his friends the Ottleys, who all read her book before Alice did. Most insultingly of all, it had hung around in his study for month after month while he rewrote the story as *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. In fact, by the time she eventually received her story book *Wonderland* was nearing publication.

Perhaps he felt a little guilty about how long it had taken him to fulfil his promise to the ‘dear child’ and perhaps about the way in which his gift had been transformed into a career move. There is some reason to suspect she may have resented it, too, and continued to do so well into adulthood. He probably remained in a sense both guilty and grateful to her for the rest of

his life. She had, after all, indirectly helped to change that life and make him the literary figure he had wanted to be since his early teens. He did not forget – indeed how could he? – to commemorate her in the four *Alice* volumes; he paid her the nice little compliment of using her birthday as a leitmotif and wrote a lovely verse just for her at the end of *Looking-Glass*. In the circumstances he might have thought it ungracious to do much less. And he never did more. He never confused Alice with ‘Alice’ as we do. She was never his ‘dreamchild’, and he never pretended that she was.

His Alice, the dreamchild, shared her name, but she enjoyed an entirely independent existence: ‘my dream-child (named after a real Alice but none the less a dream-child),’¹⁰ a creature of his fancy, whose separateness he guarded jealously, almost pointedly. Even when he wrote the first draft of the Wonderland story his ‘little heroine’ was already carefully differentiated from the real child whose name she shared. In this proto-story it is his dream-Alice who tumbles down the rabbit hole and has adventures. Alice Liddell only appears at the end, as a child Dodgson refers to as ‘another Alice’, a little girl in a boat, listening to the tale of *his* Alice’s adventures. By the time he wrote *Looking-Glass* the dreamchild was fleshed out in his mind, but her long hair trailing in the stream is not Alice Liddell’s neat bob. Even in his personal dedication in her copy of the 1886 facsimile of *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground* Dodgson carefully emphasizes that it was not her but her ‘namesake’ who ‘inspired his story’. For him, ‘dream-Alice’ reigned paramount. Alice Liddell soon became largely irrelevant. In his middle age, her contribution to it all had been reduced by the author himself to a mere accident of nomenclature.¹¹

Ironically, Dodgson’s own observations seem to say more about the probable limitations of his feelings for Alice Liddell than for many of the other girls and women in his life, and, again ironically, she seems to have been one of the very few girls that he really did lose interest in when she reached puberty. His unflattering observation about her at thirteen – that she is changed and ‘not for the better’¹² – suggests adolescent Alice was already growing into a personality he found less than congenial, and this was a tendency that seems to have continued. There are few references to her in Dodgson’s journal for the last thirty years of his life. Politeness, banality and distance characterized their later and barely existent correspondence.

His warmest sign-off to her was 'sincerely yours', cool indeed compared to the love and kisses he dispensed to so many of his female correspondents. His favourite people were always those who preserved the laughter, the spontaneity of childhood, into their adult years. Perhaps Alice Liddell did not do that. She became very 'county', married an amateur cricketer, played bridge. Perhaps her social conformity chilled him.

She asked him to be godfather to one of her children.¹³ He declined because he had too many godchildren already and had promised himself to take on no more. He made an exception of this rule for his sister's child but not for Alice's. For her part, as an adult she seems to have resented the success he had built on borrowing her name and his continued exploitation of the Alice phenomenon. He was the first one to market his own legend. She observed him publish two volumes of the original stories, a *Nursery Alice* for tots and eventually even a Wonderland Stamp Case. But when, in 1885, he wrote asking to borrow back the original manuscript of *Alice*, the little book it had taken him so long to finish for her twenty-two years before, so that it could be published in facsimile, she was stung. She did not want to let him have her book back and wrote to her father asking if she really had to, considering he had already sold 120,000 copies of the story he had told her. Her father wrote back to say that he thought she could not deny Mr Dodgson, even though he had been so successful.¹⁴ In receipt of the paternal advice, Alice, with who knows what reluctance, wrote to Dodgson to say he could have her book but that he must take care of it. He did, and in the end she got it back.

In 1888 Dodgson met the young man, Reginald Hargreaves, who had recently married Alice. If modern biography and Collingwood's heated prose are to be believed, he was encountering the man who had robbed him of his one chance of happiness; the man who had married the girl to whom he had proposed marriage when she was eleven or, according to Cohen's interpretation of the 'A.L.' reference, when she was fourteen or, again according to rumour, when she was a young woman of twenty-six. Dodgson wrote of this meeting:

I met him [Hargreaves] in our Common Room not long ago. It was hard to realize that he was the husband of one I can scarcely picture to myself, even now, as more than 7 years old.

He made almost exactly the same comment at the same time in the privacy of his journal.¹⁵

Even Alex Taylor, with commendable honesty, had to admit that this did not fit with his own theory of lifelong passion. 'That does not ring true,' he wrote, and we have to agree with him. As he points out: 'Alice was ten in the boat, thirteen when the book was published and twenty-eight when she left Christ Church to be married.' It is unquestionably difficult to imagine that any man who cherished these memories, who regarded this girl as the love of his life and her marriage as the 'greatest tragedy', who had asked for her hand when she was eleven, fourteen or twenty-six, would be unable to remember her as any more than seven years old. Taylor's only option was to conclude that Dodgson did not really mean it, but it is a dangerous moment when biography elects to put its own beliefs and its fragmentary hearsay evidence before the subject's own experience of himself.¹⁶

As she became old, and mythic in her own right, Alice Hargreaves, née Liddell, evidently was not comfortable with the growth of the legend. She never seemed to want to be dubbed the 'real Alice', perhaps because she knew that she never really had been that person. When the celebrations for the centenary of Dodgson's birth got under way, and she began to be hymned as the 'dreamchild' all over the world, she, like the rest of her family, entered into the game with tight lips and few words. Although she could have made a fortune out of her memoirs she preferred to say as little as possible, and the only manuscript she ever produced was written 'with her son [Caryl] almost literally guiding the pen'.¹⁷ Even though he tried to put as much golden gloss on it as possible, the sting of old bitterness still comes through from time to time – little drops of acid in Caryl's thickly applied sugar coating. While he dealt in the generalities of the legend, her detailed personal memories told their own little muted story. She remembered Dodgson himself slightly venomously, as looking 'as if he had swallowed a poker'. She remembered going on the river with his sisters: 'They seemed to us rather stout, and one might have expected that with such a load in it the boat would have been swamped.' She remembered old omissions: 'One Boxing Day, the horse I was riding crossed its legs and came down with me on the Abingdon Road ... I was on my back for six weeks, with a broken thigh. During all these weeks, Mr Dodgson never came to see me.' Even

though there was so much profit to be made out of being 'Alice' she could not suppress the prickly reality she remembered and play the game her son so evidently wanted her to play. Perhaps this was why she took refuge in silence and let the myth do the talking for her.¹⁸

Charlotte Zeepvat, author of a biography of Prince Leopold, youngest son of Queen Victoria, shows more acuity over the strange and pernicious nature of the Alice Liddell myth than any Dodgson biographer has yet managed. Leopold is another man with whom a fairly amorphous legend links her, her romance with him being recounted with as much certitude as any aspect of the Dodgson story. Commenting on the skewed nature of this widespread myth, Zeepvat observes: '[Prince Leopold] was in love. There was talk of a marriage, which the Queen put a stop to. The question remains: who was the girl?' There were contemporary hints linking Leopold with someone in the Liddell family but no suggestion as to who, but 'modern attention focuses exclusively on Alice because of her association with the book' and thus 'the disappointed romance between Alice Liddell and Leopold has become an accepted part of the Alice mythology'.¹⁹ He is even supposed to have named his daughter Princess Alice after her, although apparently he actually named her after his own and beloved dead sister and said so in his own words.

In fact, says Zeepvat, it seems more likely that the girl Leopold briefly courted was Alice's younger sister Edith. But this small and inconvenient truth is no match for the myth. Substitute Dodgson's name for Leopold's in the above quotation and we have an important truth about how biography has interpreted his relationship with the Liddells.

In the spring of 1930 the writer and poet Florence Becker Lennon was making preparations for her biography of Dodgson. She interviewed the one member of the Liddell family who would talk to her, Alice's 81-year-old widowed sister Ina, who was living quietly in retirement. Lennon was fairly convinced of the reality of the burgeoning Alice myth, the blighted marriage proposal and the banishment from the Deanery, and she apparently went to the interview with Ina determined to extract a confession about all this. Ina subsequently wrote two letters to her sister about this interview. The first of these reveals her astonishment as she began to realize that Lennon was fishing for evidence that Dodgson proposed marriage:

On thinking by myself, I think she tried to see if Mr Dodgson ever wanted to marry you!! She said he had such a sad face, and she thought he must have had a love affair ... and it did occur to me at the time what she perhaps was driving at!! ... I had no idea it was to be put in her book as from me!! However, thank goodness I am to see and correct it.

But the second letter makes it clear that, however astonished she might have been, Ina deliberately encouraged Lennon to continue believing the story, at least in part, for reasons of her own.

I don't suppose you remember when Mr Dodgson ceased coming to the Deanery? ... I said [to Lennon] his manner became too affectionate to you as you grew older, and that Mother spoke to him about it, and that offended him ... *as one had to give some reason for all intercourse ceasing* [emphasis added].²⁰

The last eleven words are revealing. 'One had to give some reason' conveys the very obvious fact that she is making an excuse, covering for something she doesn't want to tell. The period Ina is referring to, when 'Mr Dodgson ceased coming to the Deanery', must be the crisis covered by the cut page of June 1863, after which he stayed away from the family for some six months. We now know this was nothing to do with Alice, and Ina presumably could have told Lennon the truth about that time, but, intriguingly, she didn't. Instead the old lady told the biographer what she expected to hear. She told the 'Alice story' because she 'had to give some reason' for all intercourse ceasing and didn't feel able to say what had actually happened, whatever that may have been. In the grip of the myth Lennon let her get away with it and did not notice the sleight of hand. As such it is symbolic of our entire relationship with the myth and reality of Carroll.

If there is likely to be any truth at all in the idea that Dodgson was actively courting one of the sisters in the 1860s, then there is far more evidence to suggest that girl was Ina. In 1863 she was an attractive and physically developed teenager. Dodgson himself was aware that she was no longer a child – his comment that 'I quite think Ina is now so tall as to look odd without an escort' shows a full recognition of her maturity and, according to the most likely interpretation of the 'cut pages in diary' document, it was this fourteen-year-old that gossip linked him with at the

time. Of the three famous sisters it was Ina who most often wrote to him at this time, and Ina who received most individual recognition in his journal. Only weeks before the break with her family he was playfully racing with her over Folly Bridge. He even carefully noted the exact number of times she had been with him on the river: 'her fourteenth time', he observed, and one can almost hear the sigh.²¹ He never made any such poignant and sentimental comment about Alice, but if he had it would be seen as proof positive of – what? His favouritism; his undying love? Yet because he says it about the wrong sister, his comment, like Prince Leopold's possible love for Edith, is rendered negligible.

And then there is an undergraduate satire from 1874 called *Cakeless*. Written as a 'celebration' of Ina's marriage to William Skene, this little riff puts Dodgson (thinly disguised as 'Kraftsohn') in the role of disconsolate objector. There is even a scribbled note on one extant copy of this work that reads 'Dodgson had been rejected'. Although it does not say who had rejected him, or why, the fact the satire is dealing with Ina's wedding, implies most strongly it was she.²²

Was Dodgson 'courting' Ina, as the only recorded contemporary rumours of the time seem to suggest? Is this the source of her family's strange silence about him? In contrast to the Alice legend this possibility is plausibly supported by independent data. But, while it must remain a possibility, it is also reasonable to suggest that to see the Dodgson of the 1860s as lovelorn suitor for any of the Liddell daughters makes only limited sense in terms of his own self-knowledge or his relationship with the family. His expressed affection for all the girls is profoundly paternal and protective. Everything in his demeanour, in his writing, in the fashion in which he remembered these girls suggests that they were seen by him as a ready-made family, younger sisters or stepchildren to play at brother or father with, not as potential wives or sexualized love-objects. *Cakeless* is perhaps more a satire on Dodgson's edgy relationship with the Liddells in the 1870s, when friendship had been replaced by antagonism and political distance. Kraftsohn, nervily biting his nails and objecting acidly to everything the Dean says, is a caricature of the man who loathed Liddell and sniped at him continuously in pamphlets and squibs.

The elderly Ina's letters to her sister quoted above make it evident that – in a very similar way to Collingwood with Menella – she used Lennon's own Alice story as some form of camouflage for whatever had really been going on between Dodgson and her family at that time – which raises the obvious question: why? Why did she feel the need to invent along with Lennon's expectations? Why could she not simply tell the truth, whatever that might have been? The same question could be asked many times about different aspects of the relationship between the Liddells and Dodgson. It is an inescapable fact that while his life was at its most turbulent the Liddells were involved with him in an anomalous and curious way. His diary is full of oblique references that imply entanglements with them beyond anything recorded. He encounters them, apparently by accident, on his daily walks, on trains, while holidaying in London, with a frequency and in circumstances that imply a deliberate arrangement he never acknowledges. Almost everything about his contact with them speaks of secrecy and subtext. The idea this was all occasioned by one unwanted marriage proposal seems a little hysterical and implausible. Would Collingwood destroy four volumes of his uncle's diary and tell such brazen lies to his cousin simply to cover the fact his uncle had been 'rejected'? Other complexities seem to be implied.

This is stated most baldly by the author who has, to date, had the most unrestricted access to the Liddell private papers. 'To put it at its most melodramatic,' writes Colin Gordon, 'was Dodgson a skeleton in the Oxford closet, not to be rattled at all costs?'²³

10

Bitter Memory

But bitter memory will not die:

It haunts my soul when none is nigh:

– Lewis Carroll, ‘The Valley of the Shadow of Death’

I guessed at once (as perhaps the reader will also have guessed, if like myself, he is very clever at drawing conclusions), that my Lady was the Sub-Warden’s wife.

– Lewis Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno*

IN the late summer of 1864 there is what seems to be another of those odd and apparently unresolvable puzzles that give such a bizarre air of Gothic mystery to Dodgson’s contact with Lorina and her family. At this time mother, father and children were at their summer home, Penmorfa, on the North Wales coast, and with them was a young artist called William Blake Richmond, who was engaged in painting a portrait of Dodgson’s ‘three’: Ina, Alice and Edith. The puzzle and controversy arises from the fact that the artist apparently confided to someone, many years later, that he remembered Charles Dodgson being in that house that summer, too.¹ No record of such a visit is to be found in Dodgson’s diary, although there is a very large gap between 22 August and 13 September, when we can only guess where he was or what he was doing. Alice herself, when asked in later years whether Dodgson had ever been a guest at Penmorfa, only answered rather evasively that ‘Dodgson can’t have been at Llandudno much before 1862, because we were not there’,² which can be seen to mean as much or as little as one chooses. Her son, for some reason, misrepresented this equivocation as an outright denial, and her older sister Ina followed this example when asked the same question by Florence Becker Lennon: ‘She thought Mr Dodgson had stayed with us, but I said no.’³ This tells us what she said to Lennon, but

does not tell us what she actually knew. 'I said no', rather than 'but of course he didn't'. The customary equivocation engulfs all chance of clarity once more.

Was Richmond or his confidant confused or mendacious, or did Dodgson really spend some time there that the Liddells were not too anxious to remember? We will never know for sure. But one of the albums of his photographs at Christ Church does contain a large picture of the house at Penmorfa taken, by the look of the women's clothes, in the mid- to late 1860s. A young man, a woman, what looks like a teenage girl and three female children can be seen dotted around the frontage. They might be Lorina, Ina, Alice, Edith and Rhoda, and the man might be the artist Richmond, but the images are too distant for any attempt at identification. If Dodgson took this photograph then he was most certainly at Penmorfa at some time, but given the recent spate of gossip and the state of Dodgson's relationship with the Dean it hardly seems likely that he would have been there in the summer of 1864. He could, of course, have been there earlier, perhaps in the winter of 1863, when a gap in his diary coincides with a holiday Lorina took at Penmorfa with her children, while the Dean stayed in Oxford. Nothing is certain, but maybe the most significant factor here is the further example it gives of how embarrassed and equivocal the Liddells tended to become about any questions concerning their most intimate contact with this man.

In 1867, a few years after the possible Penmorfa incident, while still recovering from the psychological and spiritual blackness that had dominated his life for the past five years, Lewis Carroll wrote a little fairy story entitled 'Bruno's Revenge'. Although he was unlikely to have realized this at the time, it was to be the first completed section of the most massive, most self-revealing literary venture he was to undertake. Following his escape from the internal prison of his depression he seems to have had what was almost a compulsion to write down the things that troubled or obsessed him, and for the next twenty years of his life he did so, following no particular method, just writing as his thoughts dictated, accumulating disparate notes, stories, whimsical ideas and fragments of autobiography. At some time in the mid-1880s he contemplated the 'unwieldy mass' that this therapeutic outflow had grown into and decided, perhaps unwisely, to turn

it into the next Carroll publishing project. He commissioned an illustrator (the rotund and resentful Harry Furniss), thought up a title, constructed a thin connecting narrative to bind the whole together and published it as *Sylvie and Bruno* – 800 pages, in two volumes, of strange, disconnected psychological outpouring.

Described as a ‘novel’, it was actually far less coherent than that. Its origins, its compulsive and disparate nature, still show through the thin presentational gloss. In fact, the text seems to have been barely edited at all, for continuity or anything else. In published form it remains what it always was: a rag-bag of the thoughts, feelings and experiences that had obsessed the man and compelled him to put his responses on paper. This bizarre unpreparedness is stylistically painful but biographically illuminating. The very rawness and unevenness of the material makes the narrative a kind of journal of Dodgson’s mind and soul, from the late 1860s and the tail end of his period of turmoil to the unsatisfactory resolution of the last decade of his life. Unlike almost everything else in his output he did not write it to be clever, to amuse or to educate; he wrote it because he apparently had to as a way of dealing with certain things in his life. And there are, only thinly disguised, pieces of everything that mattered to him, from college politics through science and religion, to love and loss.

There has never been any doubt that a large portion of this complex and multi-layered narrative deals with the Liddells and various aspects of Dodgson’s relationship with them. He uses allegory and wordplay both to disguise and to emphasize the personal nature of this material. Most of the character names have biographical meanings stitched cleverly into them. Henry Liddell appears as ‘Sibimet’, the wildly ambitious Sub-Warden of Outland University, who is plotting to become Warden by eliminating all opposition. Lorina appears as ‘Tabikat’, usually known as ‘my Lady’, his equally ambitious wife. The section dealing most closely with them was probably completed in the early to mid-1870s, shortly after Liddell had indeed made his successful bid to become Vice-Chancellor of the university and when Dodgson was writing a series of satirical pamphlets on university politics. In *Sylvie and Bruno* he even uses the same play on the word ‘vice’ that appears in one of these pamphlets and suggests an origin of about the same time.⁴ It is, therefore, something of a record, and an important one, of

Dodgson's feelings about Liddell and his wife in the period immediately after the turmoil of the 1860s.

There is no disguising the loathing that Dodgson seems to have felt for Henry Liddell and his ambitions while he was writing this section. Liddell's sobriquet, Sibimet, is a Latin wordplay that can best be translated as 'the Great I Am', and he is firmly aligned with the forces of evil, redeemed only in the final pages of the last book. But Lorina's precise role is a little more ambiguous. She is represented as Tabikat, the loathsome, fat, debased and ridiculous woman who is Sibimet's wife; yet throughout the book Dodgson refers to this character principally as 'my Lady', and in the first chapter of the book he conflates her with 'Lady Muriel', the book's heroine and one of the most obviously adored and idealized images of romantic love he ever created. This odd dual figure enters his narrative as an unknown lady on a train, 'l'Amie Inconnue', whose veil symbolically conceals her identity. The author tries to see past this obstruction, to 'think the veil aside', in Dodgson's own obscure terminology. And when at last he does so the face of the lovely young fairy Sylvie is revealed. In this guise 'my Lady' is delightful to him, full of a vivacity and humour he finds irresistible. But then, in a moment of shifting time and dimensions, an awful truth is revealed to him: 'my Lady', he says, 'was the Sub-Warden's wife'.⁵

From that point on 'my Lady's' single character becomes divided into two. One part becomes Lady Muriel, the woman-beloved, supple in mind and body, bright and clever, the source of first love, an experience of almost religious intensity, a subject 'so sacred and so precious'. She is woman as Dodgson thought most perfect, ripe and desirable. And he puts himself into the story as Arthur, her adoring lover, who longs for her and eventually wins her. Tabikat, the other half of the division, is about decay, excess and indulgence. Her femaleness is uncontrollable: fat, overflowing, ridiculous. Like the Queen of Hearts, who can be seen as her first incarnation, she is Appetite incarnate. Stupid, impulsive, ambitious, she is almost a carnival grotesque, painted in venom but touched with moments of fierce power and bitter insight. In a bid to humiliate her to the utmost Dodgson even dresses her at one point in a bear costume while her husband cavorts as a jester. But when she tries to growl like a bear she instead produces a sound 'more like

the purring of a cat' – as if Dodgson in this bizarre allegory wants us to know about a feline rapaciousness that even his satire cannot expunge.⁶

There were obvious reasons for harbouring grudges against Liddell. The Students' revolt against the Dean and Chapter that erupted in 1865, while Dodgson was still in the throes of his unhappy entanglement with the family, made him and Liddell political opponents. Along with his friend Vere Bayne and a handful of others he had been a principal supporter of Thomas Prout in his 'anti-professorial' bid to prise some of the power from the hands of Liddell and the Canons, and in the years after the confrontation he continued to be prominent in college politics, particularly in personal opposition to Liddell. In the late 1860s and early to mid-1870s he composed a series of viciously clever satirical pamphlets lampooning Dean Liddell and his various political and architectural endeavours. 'The New Belfry of Christ Church', his satire on Liddell's strange decision temporarily to house the cathedral bells inside a large wooden box, was devastating in its waspishness and very typical of his mode of attack.

The word 'Belfry' is derived from the French 'bel', 'beautiful, becoming, meet', and from the German 'frei', 'free, unfettered, secure, safe'. Thus, the word is strictly equivalent to 'meat-safe', to which the new Belfry bears a resemblance so perfect as almost to amount to coincidence.⁷

If Liddell read this, it must have stung. For a few brief years he was the solitary and unfortunate victim of one of the sharpest and sometimes cruellest wits of the time. It is doubtful that he enjoyed it very much. Dodgson's most intense response seems to have been his resentment of this man and almost everything he did and stood for. In 'The Blank Cheque', an attack on the slightly crazy plans to spend indefinite sums on building new Examination Schools, in which various members of the university are represented as the ghastly offspring of an overindulgent mother, Liddell is 'the one real Vice among them', a play on his role as Vice-Chancellor that Dodgson used again against Sibimet, the Dean's thinly disguised alter ego in *Sylvie and Bruno*. Exactly what 'vice' he is alluding to we are never told. But Dodgson was not above making quite personal attacks in these satires. In the same pamphlet Dodgson made what can only be a direct and rather spiteful reference to the sexuality of Liddell's friend Arthur Stanley,

describing him as a ‘ a very nice boy ... and ... a great favourite with the other boys.’ In the light of Stanley’s evident preferences, the meaning would have been obvious indeed to any Oxford man.⁸

But while his portrayal of Liddell as Sibimet, ‘the Great I Am’, is fairly easy to explain, the basis of his depiction of the Dean’s wife is more ambiguous. If he had indeed ‘been rejected’ in some capacity, then his bitterness towards the woman is explicable, certainly. But why did he commence the story by conflating ‘the Subwarden’s wife’ with the desirable and beloved Lady Muriel? Is it because, as some have said, Lady Muriel is his idealized portrait of Lorina’s daughter Alice Liddell? The Alice legend has persuaded many writers that Lady Muriel simply has to be his fictional representation of her, because she was, of course, his ‘one true love’. But we know now to be sceptical of such diagnosis. If we are forced to be literal, then in light of recent evidence it is much more plausible to suggest Muriel represents Mrs Liddell’s older daughter, Ina. And perhaps indeed she does. But whether even this explains much of Dodgson’s intent is open to doubt. In combining My Lady/Lady Muriel/Fairy Sylvie into a single, shifting entity he is making his intentions perhaps deliberately obscure and metaphysical, thus rendering it impossible to say exactly what he means or why. All we can say is the images of duality, of beauty and ugliness, love and hate, seem to have symbolized the deepest meaning in his own experience of pain and loss.

As he worked his feelings – whatever their source – out of his system, pouring his confusion of emotions and thoughts on to paper, as he left the turbulent 1860s further behind, his seeming need to settle scores slowly subsided. Liddell ceased to anger and trouble him, but his contact with the Dean’s wife remained on the very edges of his diary-awareness, as it ever had been, until the end of his life. Long after his deep friendship with her family was over she continued to court his social presence. The archive does not preserve her letters but does keep his replies to these later overtures. There are several kindly phrased but quite determined rejections of the offer of her society. But on 9 June 1890 there was what seems almost like a whisper of old times. In his old curiously oblique terms he describes a meeting with Lorina on Guildford station that is obviously prearranged and the result of other contacts that have not made it into his diary:

At Guildford station I met Mrs Liddell, who had come over to look at houses (to take for the summer). I had given her the names of the house agents there. She had a list with her of houses ... and went off, at my suggestion to call at the Chestnuts and get information.⁹

She was looking for a house 'to take for the summer' near Guildford, which was where Dodgson's family now lived, and had evidently, at some previous time, discussed it with him, because he had given her 'the names of the house agents there'. It seems unlikely he was meeting her at the station by chance, but, just as in the heyday of his association with her family, he doesn't say it was pre-planned, leaving posterity simply to infer or guess. Had they arranged to go house hunting together that day? Was he bailing out at the last minute, suggesting she could always call on his sisters who lived near by if she wanted help? It seems a rather sad episode, and perhaps doubly so if the historian Raphael Shaberman's deduction about Lorina's real purpose in finding this house should be true: '1890 [the year the meeting took place] was the year prior to the Dean's retirement, when the Liddells would need to vacate the Deanery'. Shaberman surmises that Lorina was searching not simply for a summer home but for a house for her and her husband to spend their retirement, and she was 'looking for a house in the one place in England [Guildford] where she could most easily continue to see Carroll'.¹⁰ The image of Lorina as a vulnerable and unrequited torch-holder for a distant and indifferent Dodgson is sufficiently novel and poignant to arrest the mind at least for a while.

The November of the following year he wrote to her on the occasion of her husband's retirement, and, unusually, his letter survives. It is worth quoting in full:

Ch Ch Oxford,
November 12 1891

Dear Mrs Liddell,

I have been very busy, and have put off writing to you about your kind invitation, feeling I could not possibly write, in a hurry, and that it is very hard to express, to my own satisfaction, all that is in my mind.

It is *very* hard to find words which seem to express, adequately, how strongly I feel the very *great* loss, to the University, the College, the City, and to myself,

involved in the going away of the Dean and yourself. We, as the Governing Body, have had a chief of such exceedingly rare qualities that it would be vain to hope that *any* successor could *quite* fill his place. I am sure that the whole of Oxford, and all the good and charitable work carried on in it, will suffer great and permanent loss by the absence of yourself. And, to *me*, life in Christ Church will be a totally different thing when the faces, familiar to me for 36 years, are seen no more among us. It seems but yesterday when the Dean, and you, first arrived: yet I was hardly more than a boy then; and many of the pleasantest memories of those early years – that foolish time that seemed as if it would last for ever – are bound up with the names of yourself and your children: and now I am an old man, already beginning to feel a little weary of life, at any rate weary of its pleasures, and only caring to go on, on the chance of doing a little more work.

It is also very hard, at such a time, to say a word that could at all look like a want of readiness to do anything you might happen to wish, but I will trust to your kindness and tell you candidly what I feel about it.

Years ago I began declining all invitations out, feeling *very* weary of Society, and also thinking I had done my full share of it. But, years before that, I refused all Sunday invitations, on principle (though of course allowing to others the same liberty, which I claimed for myself, of judging that question). If you could kindly leave me out of the list of those who have the honour of being asked to meet your royal guests, I should personally be grateful: and I am sure there are *many* who would be most happy to fill my place: and there is no fear that the Duchess could notice, in the bewildering stream of faces she has to meet, who is, and who is not, present.¹¹

This extraordinarily self-serving, occasionally blatantly dishonest and manipulative missive could, with its dipping into hypocrisy and its oblique allusions to times past, serve as a summation of everything most significant in Dodgson's later years, as well as in his relationship with this woman and her family. His carefully worded tribute to Liddell stops just short of offering actual approbation of his 'rare qualities' as a 'chief'. His rejection of her invitation, because he 'years ago' began 'declining all invitations out', is at best sophistic, since he was by no means the hermit he is trying to suggest, and his claim that 'years before that' he had been in the habit of refusing 'all Sunday invitations' is simply breathtaking in its hypocrisy, coming from the man who would regularly go up to London for the weekend and would soon be enjoying Sundays by Constance Burch's fireside while she gave him

dinner and sewed his shirts. There is also an uncomfortable suggestion of his father's moral one-upmanship in the ghastly parenthetical reminder that he, of course, would understand if Lorina were not as religiously punctilious as he.

Yet, in contrast to all this dreadful moral posturing, redolent of middle-aged Dodgson at his very worst, there are moments of what seem like intense honesty that give us a rare glimpse of how he felt about this woman and the time he had shared with her and her children:

It seems but yesterday when the Dean, and you, first arrived: yet I was hardly more than a boy then; and many of the pleasantest memories of those early years – that foolish time that seemed as if it would last for ever – are bound up with the names of yourself and your children ...

The curious reference to 'that foolish time that seemed as if it would last for ever' is glancing, almost encoded, predictably oblique, but it conveys an expectation she will understand what he means. And, perhaps significantly, he tells her it is, for him, bound up with her name and the names of her children – but not her husband. It would be interesting to know if she replied and what she might have said, but if there was such a letter it has gone the same way as all the others she had written over the years. No trace remains in either the Liddell or Dodgson archives.

As the years went on, he maintained his friendships with some of her children; Ina in particular, whom he seems always to have especially liked, Harry, who had been his first 'little favourite', and Violet, who had been born in the midst of 'that foolish time'. She was a keen and talented artist, and when she was twenty-four Dodgson made her a present of a fancy pencil sharpener, a grand brass thing he gave only to his 'special friends'.¹² He wrote her a letter to go with it that speaks of quite close contact we yet know nothing about:

Dear Miss Violet Liddell

I hope you haven't got one of these machines already, which would, I fear, much lessen your appreciation of this – which is perhaps more worthy of your acceptance, though perhaps not much more, than the wire puzzle ... It is the invention of a friend of mine: so I am bound, if only to my position as his friend, to make his invention known to any whose exhaustive knowledge of

Dynamics (here I do not allude to you), or whose miserly craving for anything bright and metallic (here I do not allude to you), or whose artistic pursuits, rendering the sharpening of pencils an hourly necessity (here I allude to you) fits them for it.¹³

Just before the Liddells were to leave Oxford on the Dean's retirement Dodgson asked Lorina if Violet and her older sister Rhoda could have tea with him in his rooms. His letter added a final sidelong allusive comment on things gone by:

If I were twenty years younger, I should not, I think, be bold enough to give such invitations: but, but, I am close on sixty years old now: and all romantic sentiment has quite died out of my life: so I have become quite hardened as to having lady visitors of any age ...

As Cohen observes: 'the remark may not refer to his relationship with Alice, but if "romantic sentiment" had not played a role in the break that occurred in the 1860s between Charles and the Liddells, one might argue, he need hardly have mentioned it'.¹⁴

The evidence we have reviewed in this chapter and throughout this book suggests that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was not born from the strange mind of a dreamy and virginal recluse who loved little girls but from the mind of a man immersed in a strange game of families with a married woman and her children. A man who was in many ways usurping the paternal role in the children's lives. What might be a glimpse of this strange ménage from the displaced father's point of view is given in the oddest way by William Blake Richmond, the artist who stayed at Penmorfa during the controversial summer of 1864, when he claims Dodgson was there, too. Richmond gives a character portrait of the Dean that is both knowing and affectionate. He acknowledges the man's cool and emotionless exterior, and this makes his subsequent description of a scene he witnessed all the more striking and strange:

Enoch Arden came out while I was staying with the Dean. He read it aloud in the evenings and the other poems in the same volume, while I drew and the girls sewed. He read very splendidly with restrained, dramatic force, and great feeling. He specially admired the sermon in *Aylmer's Field*; and when Enoch comes back, looks in at the window, and sees the new husband and the wife of

his youth among their children, he fairly broke down: the strong, stern man was moved beyond his power of restraint.¹⁵

The scene that moved Liddell so uncharacteristically, ‘beyond the powers of restraint’, was the moment from Tennyson’s *Enoch Arden* when Enoch, who has been missing and long thought dead, looks unseen through the window of his old home and sees his wife and children in the company of the man who has taken his place:

Now when the dead man come to life beheld
His wife his wife no more, and saw the babe,
Hers, yet not his, upon the father’s knee,
And all the warmth, the peace, the happiness,
And his own children tall and beautiful,
And him, that other, reigning in his place,
Lord of his rights and of his children’s love¹⁶

Whether or not Dodgson was in his house at that time it is entirely plausible that the Liddell of the 1860s, who had watched a younger man claim so much of his children’s time and affection, might understand something of Enoch Arden’s sense of poignant displacement. Henry Liddell, the Peter Teazle half of ‘the couple in the old comedies’, in Thackeray’s shrewd observation, with his fustiness and his death fixation, his odd hysterical friendship with his beloved Arthur Stanley, is not a glamorous figure, but he may have been rather a tragic one. Perhaps, in a way, they all were. At least no clear winners seem to emerge from this odd, obscure and furtive episode. Dodgson became a stranger, more secretive man and the Liddells were apparently blighted by the threat of potential unnamed scandal, something that still haunted them when Alice and her sisters were old ladies. Ina was cautious about his memory to the point of deception; Alice refused to talk about him publicly at all, and her few recorded memories are dipped in acid. Yet she clearly also felt an odd and indissoluble kinship. After Dodgson’s death she wrote to his publishers to ask for the original wooden printing blocks of Tenniel’s illustrations. When she was told they had been destroyed, she demanded in curiously revealing words: ‘What then shall I have as my legacy?’¹⁷ It is as if she still could not help but see

Dodgson as the quasi-parent he had once been to her. A 'father' who ought to have bequeathed her something more tangible than memories.

It was perhaps the same curious vestigial bond that made her need to commemorate him in her youngest child's name. Caryl Liddell Hargreaves she called her last born, linking her real father with the pseudonym of the man who had been so much to her and her sisters for such a brief and intense period of her young life. Characteristically, of course, she denied there was any intended connection, claiming she had got Caryl's name from a novel. The obliqueness and dissimulation make a fitting epitaph to it all, her individual and almost reluctant tribute to that 'foolish time that seemed as if it would last for ever' – apparently too shameful and shadowed to be openly acknowledged, but perhaps too precious to be entirely forgotten.

In summary, we can see that the Liddell family seem to be almost as closely involved in Dodgson's 'mystery of pain' as the man himself. Their entanglement with him seems deep, confused and only partially acknowledged. But it does not seem to conform in any way to the mythic image of that entanglement. There is little to indicate Lorina as hostile and protective mother, or of Alice as target of desperate and inappropriate love, and much to cast serious doubt on any such analysis. On the contrary, Lorina seems to have welcomed the young Dodgson into her home, indulged his passion for photography and bent the rules of social contact almost to breaking point in order to preserve his curious role in her family. Even after the gossip reached such a pitch and Dodgson felt the need to 'hold aloof' for a while, even then she permitted his return to her family home and at a time when her husband was away, thereby placing her and her daughters' reputations at even greater risk. She collected photographs of him but forbade her husband's biographer to mention his name. Her oldest daughter remembered him tenderly, her second daughter with obvious and unexplained antagonism. A famous artist remembered him holidaying with the family one summer by the sea, while the family strenuously denied it was ever true. Alice's son, in turn, created the myth of Lorina's 'hatred' of Dodgson, which he offered without any explanation and then later retracted, just as inexplicably.¹⁸

Why these things were so is only one of the many unanswered questions, but reviewing, as we have, the procession of paradoxes, coincidences, elisions and allusions, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that these people could have said more than they did about the events of those strange years and possibly about the origins of his sense of sin. They took him into their lives and were intimately involved with him in the most dramatic, passionately creative and anguished period of his existence. And when it was over they were left with a legacy of secrecy and silence almost as profound as that enfolding the Dodgson family itself.

The missing evidence and their silence has ensured sure we can go no further than this.

11

'A Prisoner in His Cell'

'I am half sick of shadows,' said

The Lady of Shalott

– Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Lady of Shalott*

IN the late 1860s Charles Dodgson was a man recovering from the troubles life had bestowed on him. He had been through a period of intense turmoil, lost his youthful certainty, his self-confidence, his sense of direction. He had lost, too, the fantasy of family life he had enjoyed with the family that was never really his. But he had gained an understanding of the more bitter side of life, the meaning of sin, temptation, the possibilities of redemption. He was, most truly, the thing he had posed at fitfully in his twenties – a man of the world. Given time, he might still have integrated his destructive experience into his sense of self and rediscovered the moral power to continue his longterm rebellion against the social and religious conformity that he had always found uncongenial. But in June 1868, while he was still struggling to come to terms with his old abandoned sins, still fretful and vulnerable, his sainted and resented father died suddenly and without warning. The Archdeacon was a robust and apparently healthy man and such an overwhelming presence that he must have seemed likely to last for ever. Probably none of his children had ever given a thought to what they would do without him.

The first that Charles knew of anything amiss was the arrival of a telegram. He left Oxford for Croft immediately, but so great was his shock and the subsequent fresh turmoil in his life that he did not fill any details of this or anything else in his diary for another two months. His father's death changed everything at a time when Charles was perhaps least emotionally and psychologically prepared for it. It left him the nominal head of the family whose values and morals he had been rejecting in spirit and practice

for several years. It left him in charge of ten brothers and sisters, all of whom had, throughout their lives, been entirely dependent on their father for material and moral security (with the possible exception of slightly maverick Wilfred, who had had a girl-friend). Neediness was all they were used to, and probably almost immediately they transferred that neediness on to the eldest brother hurrying up from the south, who would be expected to find comfort and answers for all of them.

In practical terms he had to find somewhere for them all to live, since Croft Rectory, the family home, went with the parish and would be wanted soon for the new incumbent. In addition, he had to find work urgently for his three unemployed brothers, since he could not afford to subsidize them as his father had apparently been prepared to do. With these huge practical considerations, as well as all the usual business of clearing up after a death, he probably did not have much time at first to pay attention to his own feelings. But they were there and powerfully so. Despite, or more probably because of, the differences between him and his father he felt this death more intensely than any other in his life. Not primarily through the loss of a parent but through the loss of the chance to make amends.

His failure to become a priest, to settle down in married respectability in a little parish somewhere, his wayward pursuit of artistic and literary careers, his theatre jaunts, his actor and artist friends, his unorthodox friendship with the Liddells, and – whether suspected by the father or not – the gossip this had engendered, were all things far removed from anything the Archdeacon could be expected to condone or even forgive. This, together with the evident discomfort that Charles felt with aspects of the old man's High Church religion, his mockery of him in those youthful verses, means that they spent much of their relationship either covertly or openly at odds with one another. Before his ultimate sin, David's sin, settled on him, Charles had considered himself his father's equal, felt able even to mock his sire, to leave him and find his own way. But his sin had made him his sinless father's moral inferior, and the father's death, coming just when it did, robbed his son of the chance ever to effect any change in that position, to reweight the moral scales in his own favour. The dead Archdeacon's authority could not be mocked, his dead opinions could never be

challenged. He had risen to be one with the saints, and the son who had opposed him was thus cast in perpetuity as one of the fallen.

Charles's reaction to this speaks of the already fractured state of his own nervous system. For the first two years after the Archdeacon died, he spent uncharacteristically long periods in self-confessed inactivity, while the residue of his old dead guilt gave way to a kind of drifting numbness. He was a good and conscientious 'head of family'. He moved his sisters into a new house in Guildford and set his brothers up in various occupations. But his own life seemed to have been put on hold. There were no new friendships with women, nothing to take the emotional place of the Liddells, mother and children. The restless ambition, the drive for artistic recognition that had been one of his principal motivations before, seems to have all but disappeared and to have been replaced by a new inactivity. His bid to join the London salons, his courting of the rich and famous in search of sitters for his camera, became largely things of the past, and he could note in his diary that 'this solitary leisure is very enjoyable', almost as if, freed for the first time from the Calvinistic all-seeing eyes of his father, he felt able to write down thoughts he had previously felt would be wiser kept to himself.¹

The second *Alice* book was completed during this muted time, its tone of renunciation and autumnal melancholy evidently expressing his mood. But although it dealt with themes that reflected his own life at the time, loss and ageing, it was, perhaps even more than its predecessor, a commercial venture intended to exploit the financial and artistic success of *Wonderland*. With six unmarried sisters to support he was in need of the money, and he told his diary that he hoped that this new work was the equal of its older sibling – and certainly ought to be for the amount of labour that had gone into it. There was almost an edginess in his observation, an irritability with the whole process, that indicates the extent to which he was doing this work more from perceived necessity than from inspiration. It is true, as Lennon observed, that the resultant work 'exudes the ripe flavour of approaching decay and disintegration.'² The difference, however, was not Alice or even the absence of her sisters and her mother from his life. The difference was the new presence of death.

As Dodgson began, through the mid-1870s, to emerge from his numb and drifting time, he became ever more consumed with the idea of his own

salvation, of himself as a reformed sinner seeking re-entry into the ranks of the blessed. His ambiguous response to his father living was replaced by a frantic worship of his father dead, as if the only source of salvation left open to him was prostration before the internal altar of the man's image. He may or may not have loved his father, but it was not love that brought this about; perhaps if he had loved his father more and doubted him less this posthumous burden would never have fallen on him. Love usually brings its own absolution. It was his old friend guilt that erected this tabernacle in his mind and guilt that kept it freshly stocked with funeral lilies until the end of his own life.

Overt opposition to anything the man had believed or stood for became an impossibility, almost an abomination; a synonym for the rejection of God himself. To buttress himself against this awful possibility, to obscure the doubt in the centre of his own soul, the questioning voice he could no longer wholly trust, was the business of Dodgson's later life. To effect this he even began to adopt aspects of his dead father's persona, echoes of the man's pomposity, a humourless sententiousness that had previously been alien to him, as if he were unconsciously trying to bring the father back to life inside himself. The man who joked about Wordsworth's piety, who mocked the bourgeois morality of Watts's verse, became almost entirely effaced by another persona, infinitely strange, as shifting and indefinable as the light in a crystal.

It is not so much that he changed fundamentally. For most practical purposes he continued to live as before. Instinctively he was still driven to turn his back on almost everything his father stood for. His passions for art, for female beauty, were still, as they had always been, the driving forces of his life. His instinctive response to religion continued to be anything but orthodox High Church. What changed was his ability to be any longer entirely honest about that, even within himself. He began to live increasingly within a fractured self-awareness in which he was both himself and aspects of his dead father; policing his own self and dodging away from his own self-recognition like a child from an admonishing parent. In effect, he continued to move away from his parent, continued to find his own morality, his own beliefs; by the end of his life he was airing opinions and practising a lifestyle that would have been incomprehensible to the

Archdeacon. But it became as unthinkable for Dodgson to acknowledge his schism with his father as it was impossible for him to deny it in his actions. His sense of self became in a way as motile and inconstant as a summer midge, moving always one step ahead of his own judgement. He was crossing back and forth over the boundaries of 'decency', trying to lash together with the ever-twisting threads of thinnest perception his two irreconcilable needs to be both himself and his own dead sire; while maybe as a result of this internal confusion his personal ambition, his drive to succeed and to be recognized as a success, even eventually his extraordinary genius, the things that had defined his earlier life and driven him through his period of guilt seemed to be almost voluntarily relinquished, laid out as a sacrifice to his salvation.

Hence some of the crazy internal contradictions of his later years. Hence the middle-aged man who could at different times and for different audiences describe himself as belonging to 'the High Church school' or as one who had abandoned all such dogma in favour of 'Broad Church' tolerance. A man who could flirt with spiritualism and Madame Blavatsky's 'esoteric Buddhism', question some of the most fundamental creeds of the Anglican Church and still claim that he had seen 'little cause' to differ greatly from his father's views.³ Hence his complex and apparently contradictory personal morality. Hence, too, the beginning of his serious and, in a way, self-imposed love affair with childhood, his reinvention of himself – or rather of his pseudonym – as the friend of children everywhere. With the death of his father and the collapse of his illusory relationship with the Liddells, his search for the rebirth of his own innocence became almost frantic. It was almost inevitable, given the mores of his time, that the principal route this search would take was through the magic land of Victorian childhood.

Dodgson's perceived love of childhood became his deliverance, his one unsullied claim to the promised land. For the first time in his life he began to seek the society of children in a self-conscious and deliberate way. The things he did for children, time he spent with them were seen by him as acts of atonement, as a kind of proof that however grubby other pieces of his soul might be his heart somehow remained true. And the most potent symbol of this belief was his first Alice book. He wove a story of self-sacrifice around

this act of creation and set it at the heart of his new image of himself. The tale he told the readers of *The Theatre* in the 1880s encapsulates exactly how Dodgson wanted his relationship with childhood to be understood by himself and others. His claim to have written the story purely for the benefit 'of a child I loved' was as apocryphal as his memorable image of the perfect and golden afternoon, at best a distortion and at worst a travesty of the reality that had seen *Alice's Adventures* born. But it allows us to see how Dodgson himself wanted it to have been. And he sought to enact exactly this self-conscious self-sacrifice, this suffering of little children, in his own daily life.⁴

In 1877 he gave up his holidays in London and the Isle of Wight and opted instead for Eastbourne. This sedate seaside town became his summer home for the last twenty years of his life, and this change of venue echoes the changes in his heart and demeanour. He was no longer the ambitious would-be artist; instead, a Janus-faced part-time clergyman, trying to emulate his father's self-conscious virtue but doing it by picking up girls.

As his books were sold around the world, as his fame grew to take on a life of its own, as the legend of Carroll quickened into independence, so Dodgson both utilized and built upon the image of purity and children to facilitate the reinvention of himself as an innocent soul. The legend both taught him how he was expected to behave and learned from his example. At the height of this obsession he would stalk the beaches, searching for children to be selfconsciously kind to, and with his charm and his (delicately exploited) fame he found them by the dozen. His spirit of self-sacrifice was tempered always by his touchy sensibilities, and only the brightest, most attractive middle-class children were favoured with his attention. In a curiously mannered, almost stylized way, he courted them, offering his time, his charm, his magic for their service. He dedicated his works to them, as a conscious effort to emulate his own invented story of how Alice was born: to try to realize his ideal of writing, not for money or fame (although, of course, he did, inevitably, write for both) but for the simple joy of pleasing a Godly Child. By mutual agreement both parties infused these Carroll-child encounters with magic. For the children it was Santa's grotto, and they were dazzled by the sudden proximity of a piece of fairyland. For Dodgson it was the proof that however travel-stained his soul, however much he carried the

memory of David's sin with him, his heart was yet pure enough to be touched by innocence. As the mores of his time had taught him, he looked into a child's eyes and saw God himself, felt the awe and privilege of 'conversing with an angel.'⁵ Carroll and his child-friends, both hungry for wonders, fed off one another greedily.

In 1876 he published what may be his greatest work of genius, *The Hunting of the Snark*, the allegorical story of an ill-assorted crew who set off to hunt the eponymous monster. It is ruthlessly adult in its humour and its satire, and like the far inferior *Sylvie and Bruno* it is a jumble of personal and political references. It plays with the then highly topical and sensational Tichborne 'wandering heir' case and uses as a strange leitmotif the haunting incantations of the Mistletoe Bough: 'They sought her that night, and they sought her next day, and they sought her in vain though a year passed away.' In *Snark* this becomes the repeated thread, 'They sought it with thimbles, they sought it with care, they pursued it with forks and hope.' What did he mean by using this apparently incongruous link to a poem about a lost and beloved bride? Although he claimed to be unsure of what the 'nonsense' poem was really about, Dodgson liked the idea, suggested by a lady-friend, that the ultimately hopeless 'hunt' was an allegory for the search for happiness.⁶ Whether or not it was intentional, such a poignant ambition fits well with the thread of sadness and longing woven into the narrative and with his own bereft state of mind at the time of its composition. Indeed, the hopelessness of achieving happiness in life was a recurring theme in his private and public writings at this time and later. But so far the possible meanings and its autobiographical significances have attracted almost no literary analysis. Its power, its essential and acute 'adulthood' have been lost, perhaps as Dodgson himself half wanted them to be lost, behind a single image.

True to his desire to see himself as a man inspired to write solely by the innocent love of little ones, he dedicated *Snark* to one of his new child-friends, a girl he had not even known when he began to write it. Her name was Gertrude Chataway, and she is remembered today as a little girl in a fisherman's jersey who had listened to his stories while on holiday on the Isle of Wight the previous summer. She became a genuine friend and one of his photographic models, who would still be a beloved companion twenty years

later, but it is as a little girl that he immortalized her, as a little girl that he made sure she contributed to his legend, and it is as a castrated song for a little girl that the infinitely strange and wonderful *Hunting of the Snark* is now remembered.

He was indeed at this period in his life a driven man, but the impetus was primarily his religious not his sexual instinct. It was not suppressed sexual need that drove him, it was a very conscious search for sanctity. Each time he gave away his time, or his 'love', or the products of his genius to a child he was, in effect, acting out his own society's fervent delusion of the pre-pubescent girl as a pathway to divinity. In thrall to the Victorian child-religion, he convinced himself that the little girls all around him were in a sense 'angels', and he invested them with a sickly, cloying virtue that was grotesquely unreal and entirely alien to his own spiky distaste for such sentimentality. 'I don't think I ever looked into eyes that said more plainly how honest and pure a soul looked out through them,' he wrote to the mother of one favourite. 'I think when He "called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them", that child must have had much the same look as Enid!'⁷

It is hard to credit that the man who wrote this had eight younger siblings and must have known the grubby reality of a child's existence better than most parents. This, in a way, was not Dodgson at all, with Dodgson's smiling cynicism and Dodgson's worldly experience: this was 'Lewis Carroll', unworldly enough to really believe such things. By sheer force of will he could, temporarily at least, make himself into such a one. He professed to love all of the children he 'collected', and presumably he tried to do so. The 'love' he reserved for them was an entirely special kind, that he tried to explain once to one child who had sent him her photograph.

Photographs are very pleasant things to have, but love is the best thing in the world ... Of course I don't mean it in the sense meant when people talk about 'falling in love', that's only one meaning of the word, and only applies to a few people. I mean in the sense in which we say that everybody in the world ought to 'love everybody else'.⁸

He meant a Christ-like love without passion or selfishness. In his most personal work, *Sylvie and Bruno*, he embodied this sense of altruism as true

love in the character of fairy Sylvie. The love she – the ultimate Angel-child – feels and inspires is the reverent love of religious intoxication. In its absolute self-abnegation it is an entirely inhuman emotion, and no human being could experience the entire abandonment of self that is at its root. However much Dodgson may have longed to experience it, and even convinced himself that he did, his image of perfect Love must ultimately have been, like the entire contrivance of his carefully balanced sense of self, an internal artifice. His passions, whether for child or woman, were always rooted in his powerfully sensual and sexual self. But it would be wrong to dismiss his claim to this transcendental state as pure hypocrisy. When Dodgson professed to love ‘the child’ he was not merely deluding himself and his audience. He was demonstrating to himself, and presumably to his God, that he at least recognized the desirability of a love that ascended beyond sexuality and selfishness, even if he was not capable of wholly embracing it.

There was behind this hunting of the child, in part at least, a genuine and aspirational generosity; a heart and a mind that were truly open, sometimes beyond the mores of his time. When someone anticipated, with the casual anti-Semitism of the time, that he would not want his books given away to Jewish children, he responded with unfeigned astonishment, demanding to know why the ‘little Israelites’ should not enjoy his book as much as any children anywhere.⁹ In his best moments he truly strove to live by his concept of universal Love. For him it was no esoteric prescription for the other world; it was a moral force for bringing decency and rationality into this, and his instinct for justice transcended his Conservative and High Anglican education, making him sometimes a radical despite himself. In 1875 he took up the cause of anti-vivisection and wrote passionately about his views in the pages of the *Fortnightly Review*. He put his case with his own mix of intense emotion and rigorous intellectual analysis. He argued that ‘the prevention of suffering to a human being does not justify the infliction of a greater amount of suffering on an animal’ and foresaw, with almost clairvoyant insight, where the evolving amorality of modern science could lead:

Surely the easy-going Levites of our own time would take an altogether new interest in this matter, could they only realise the possible advent of a day when

anatomy shall claim as legitimate subjects for experiment, first our condemned criminals, next perhaps the inmates of our refuges for incurables – then the hopeless lunatics, the pauper hospital patient, and generally ‘him that hath no helper’ ... a day when successive generations of students, trained from their earliest years to the repression of all human sympathies, shall have developed a new and more hideous Frankenstein – a soulless being to whom science shall be all in all.¹⁰

This offers a presentiment of the Nazis’ ‘final solution’ and perhaps of our own morally dyslexic time when science is the new religion. Whatever his other ambivalences, the man with the insight to see so far ahead along the road his society was traversing, and the passion to care as much as he evidently did, must qualify as a decent as well as an extraordinary individual.

But the other aspect of post-crisis Dodgson’s love affair with ‘childhood’ was indeed cynical in the extreme. Even while he was endeavouring to fulfil the prophesy of his own confessional poem, ‘Stolen Waters’, and find his salvation through the purity of a child’s love, so he was, with absolute paradox, using this same image to cover his more unconventional contacts with more mature members of the opposite sex. However much he played the part of the Victorian lover of children, and although his enjoyment of their society was genuine up to a point, he was in some ways the least equipped of men to find complete satisfaction in the role of universal foster-uncle. He needed adult society and particularly adult female society. He needed to flirt, to romance, to feel the intellectual and emotional support of a sympathetic, challenging adult mind.

In the decade immediately after his ‘divorce’ from the Liddells, when he seems to have exiled himself from any close friendships with women, he tried sometimes, almost inevitably, to find these things in the children he was so actively courting, but, just as inevitably, it never worked and such ambivalent friendships tended to collapse quickly and in mutual confusion. He was lonely for the company of women, and perhaps for the role of quasi-father that had once so oddly been his. ‘Child-society is very delightful to me: but I confess that grown-up society is much more interesting!’ he confided to one woman-friend in a singularly unguarded moment;¹¹ and shadowed beneath his towering legend this truth remains shyly self-evident.

He was a friend of children largely by self-invention. Inevitably, however much he strove to disguise the fact, he was driven to seek the mature companionship he needed. Inevitably, as a bachelor who was, for whatever reason, disinclined to take the socially acceptable means of satisfying his emotional and other needs by marrying, this brought him into varying amounts of conflict with the social conventions of his day.

He began during the late 1870s and 1880s to involve himself in a series of close friendships with women such as Sarah Blakemore, Theo Heaphy and Edith Denman, and his photographs, too, began to represent older flesh. He was doing routine studies of child nudes and questing always for the more elusive older models prepared to discard their Victorian modesty and their clothes for him. Unsurprisingly perhaps, in the early part of 1880, when he was forty-eight, gossip erupted about him in a new and potentially devastating way.

On 5 February he kissed a girl of seventeen, Atty Owen, in front of her father, assuming her to be a year or two younger and therefore socially kissable. The parents took offence and he apologized in a way almost guaranteed to fuel the fire. In his own words, he ‘wrote a mock apology to Mrs Owen, assuring her that the incident had been “as distressing to her daughter as it was to myself”, but adding that I would kiss her no more.’¹² The strait-laced and evidently humourless parents were not mollified; in fact they seem to have become determined to bring him to some kind of social reckoning, and Mrs Owen in particular proved an impressive player of the vendetta game. She began to spread rumours about his young women, his photography and his morals. This was not an entirely new experience for him, and his initial response seems to have been almost suicidally reckless, as if part of him almost welcomed social ostracism. Undaunted, he continued his photography, buying in stockings and bathing costumes for his older girls to pose in, bringing the young women to his studio unchaperoned or in the company of other young women. He made himself an easy target for Mrs Owen’s revenge and a joke of the threat that it posed for him. Dodgson’s letters at this time to his good friend Alice Kitchin show his insouciant amusement cracking in the face of Mrs Owen’s implacable bid to undermine him: ‘If ever you should, in the course of conversation with Mrs Owen, touch on the subject of the angry correspondence just

concluded, I hope you will sooth [sic] her feelings,' he wrote breezily on 12 February, 'and get her to consent to forgive me at some future time (say 5 years hence).'

He could not forbear to bait the Owens still further. 'I have done a very bold thing,' he told Alice Kitchin on 2 June, '– asked Mr Owen to let me have Atty to photo! No answer has come. Probably they are angry again.'

They were. And this time they were apparently out for his blood. 'I met Mr S. Owen a few days ago, and he looked like a thunder-cloud,' Dodgson wrote again to Alice on 25 July.

I fear I am permanently in their black books now: not only by having given fresh offence – apparently – by asking leave to photo Atty ... but also by the photos I have done of other people's children. Ladies tell me people condemn those photographs in strong language: and when I enquire more particularly I find that 'people' means 'Mrs Sidney Owen'!

His disarming use of the word 'children' was of course deliberate and misleading. It was precisely because Atty and his models were not children that he was in his present difficulties. Indeed in this same letter he confides that he has recently photographed fifteen- or sixteen-year-old Gerida Drage in a 'swimming dress'. 'Do you know her?' Dodgson asks Mrs Kitchin airily. 'She is rather handsome.'¹³

Coincidentally or not, this photographic session with Gerida and her older sister on 15 July was, apparently, the last he ever had. After this, he seems suddenly and inexplicably to have stopped his work completely. For the remaining eighteen years of his life his carefully equipped studio, his beloved cameras, his darkroom and his costume box would go unused. One of the finest photographic artists of his generation simply stopped working and never provided any public explanation that was not self-evidently some kind of excuse. It is hard to imagine that he would have lightly given up his passionate pursuit of this art form that had been so much of his life for so long. We cannot know for certain if Mrs Owen's vindictiveness and his own crazy response to it ignited a scandal sufficiently intense to force him to give up photography for good, but it seems likely that this was indeed the case. It was another loss, another stripping away of things that mattered to him; another sacrifice perhaps on the altar of old sin. He was never to be a

photographic artist again. Why did he do this? Did he court ruin and social disaster, tease a monster of petrified rectitude like Mrs Owen just to achieve his own ignominy? Did he want to be 'punished', even while he dreaded absolute social rejection? Is this part of the strange game he was playing?

At the same time, and perhaps in some kind of compensation, his utterances as 'Carroll' become increasingly prim and increasingly detached from anything he could truly have believed about himself. 'Do no sketches or photos for me on a Sunday,' he said to his artist friend Gertrude Thomson, a request it is hard not to take as satire from a man who had entertained his actress friends in his rooms on Sunday evenings or who had spent his days of rest in the cosy company of another man's wife. 'A girl of 12 is my ideal of beauty of form,' 'don't get an adult model any time you are expecting me' – it is impossible to imagine that he ever truly believed this of himself, even while he said the words.¹⁴ Could he entirely forget the contents of his own portfolio – the images of full-breasted nude bodies he owned and admired? Was he becoming truly dissociated and unable to recognize his own contradictions? Or was it all a piece of mask-theatre? Playing the part as near to parody as he dared. This was, after all, a master satirist. Throughout his life he specialized in playing the cosmic joker with other people's slower wits, spinning threads of alternate reality to catch the unwary, declining to spare anyone from the trap of their own stupidity or folly. If you did not catch on, then more fool you. His life as he lived it and his life as he declaimed it from the stage of his Carroll theatre personified the two separate aspects of his own persona: himself as he could not help but be and himself as an expression of his father. To what extent it was just a collection of satirical distorting mirrors is an important if unanswerable question. If it was, in any sense, a private joke it must have been an exquisitely dark and bitter one. The man who could smile at that would surely find black humour in the fact that today the image he embraced in order to save his reputation is used to destroy it. Perhaps he would see there the hand of a just and avenging God.

If he had felt able to satisfy his need for female companionship within the bonds of conventional marriage, or even if he had been able to settle for a single girl- or woman-friend over the years, even without the benefit of matrimony, then his life would have been an easier one. But he did not do

this. After his separation from the Liddells and his period of strange, distracted child-hunting during the mid- to late 1870s, he began another phase, indulging in an increasingly 'promiscuous' succession of friendships with a large and ever-changing collection of older girls and women. He began operating what was almost a rota, taking a succession of different companions to town, to supper, to the seaside for holidays, as if he was afraid to grow too familiar with any one woman or show her too much favouritism; spreading his favours over a 'collection' of females that featured some of the most intelligent and talented women of the age. They included the artist Theo Heaphy; actresses Isa Bowman, Irene Vanbrugh, Dolly Baird (the latter who created the part of Trilby opposite du Maurier's Svengali) and John Gielgud's mother Kate Terry Lewis; intellectuals such as Constance Burch and Ethel Rowell (who became one of the first female mathematical lecturers), Aldous Huxley's mother Julia Arnold and others, too many to list. A man might have thought himself fortunate to have won the affections and loyalty of any one of these women, and he most certainly did win their affections and loyalty. But for Dodgson one companion was never enough, however talented, beautiful and divinely intelligent she might be. He needed constant, incessant variety, apparently whatever the cost.

His multifarious women-friends of these post-Liddell years were all devoted to him in their own different ways. Some were his photographic models or his logic pupils. Some were married women, whose husbands were, for whatever reason, absent from the scene and whose children came to regard him to some degree as a substitute father, as if almost consciously modelled on the seminal relationship he had enjoyed with Lorina Liddell and her girls. He professed to 'love' them all in his own sensuous yet avowedly altruistic manner. But one senses that, in a way, all these many bodies and minds were interchangeable, that they all served a function of substitution or distraction rather than being valued for what they were in themselves. He was convinced that none of them would keep his interest beyond the 'honeymoon'. Whatever it says about his psychological health and the possible long-term effects of his guilt trauma, the Dodgson of his middle years had become apparently incapable of settling for a single female companion for even a brief period.

The question of how likely it is that the majority of these contacts involved some kind of sexual exchange perhaps only arises because of the legend of his celibacy. He nowhere states explicitly that they did, but this kind of absence of evidence isn't usually taken as indicating definitive evidence of absence. Many of these friendships were certainly flirtatious. 'Your sexagenarian lover,' he signed himself provocatively to 24-year-old Edith Miller. To 23-year-old Julia Arnold he likened being deprived of her kisses to being tormented by thirst while watching others drink.¹⁵ The relationships were often defined by the language of love and desire. They were intimate, confiding. The women holidayed with him alone, dined with him tête-a-tête; were prepared to wear the public trappings of private lover even to the possible destruction of their reputations. Theoretical love affairs have been built into the biographies of other men based on far less than we have here, but, without any confirmation or denial from Dodgson himself or the women, we can only guess. Does the fact that he suffered no outpourings of guilt while he associated with these women imply that he refrained from crossing some self-imposed line? He was striving always to be a moral man, to live a decent life, but the picture is blurred by the fuzzy nature of his most personal morality, which becomes ever more difficult to determine as his life progresses. In middle age, and under cover of his intermittent assumption of his father's moral absolutism, Dodgson had refined the personal philosophy that had always been at odds with the middle-class morality of his day. It had become part of his belief system that individuals should be guided in their actions only by their own internal sense of right and wrong and not by any exterior dictates. He explained this philosophy in a letter to his friend Mary Brown.

God has given [an individual] conscience ... and this he ought to obey ... If he acts without attending to that inner voice ... he is doing wrong, whatever the resulting act may be. But if, having duly used all those means, he then does what seems to him right, that is right in the sight of God, whatever the resulting act may be.¹⁶

This is a very Swedenborgian philosophy. Dodgson's friend Coventry Patmore, whom he met in middle age, was a follower of Swedenborg, and Dodgson was evidently influenced by him. The Swedenborgian religious

morality was heavily pro-sensual, heavily individualistic. It appealed to him on an instinctive level. It argued, much as Dodgson did, for the primacy of individual conscience and for a morality that transcended social mores. Like Patmore, Dodgson had begun to believe that sex had the capacity to be either 'accursed' or 'beautiful' and that 'marriage' was the sacrament that transformed the potential sinfulness of sexual love into something 'innocent and blessed'. But what he meant by the word 'marriage' and what was meant by most people at that time were rather different things. A cruel marriage, an unhappy marriage, was for the Swedenborgians and for Dodgson no marriage at all. A woman trapped in such a union would not be guilty of adultery if she took a lover; in fact, she might be more truly 'married' to this man if she loved him than to her acknowledged husband.

His views on divorce were equally liberal, even radical for his time. He was pragmatic and worldly enough to view marriage as a contract as well as a sacrament. He had no time for the extreme religious view that opposed divorce or any remarriage even after the death of a spouse. The latter idea he derided as 'at variance with Scripture as well as with common sense'.¹⁷

The ambiguities of the Swedenborgian philosophy suited his own psychological state, his need both to court and reject his own society. It allowed him to play the games of double-meaning he excelled in and required in order to make all things about himself less than clear. When he considered himself to be doing nothing wrong, it did not therefore necessarily mean that his society would have agreed with him. His letter to his sister Mary in 1893, responding to her concern over the rumours surrounding the series of young women who were sharing his seaside lodgings, is a very qualified self-defence that pointedly refrains from giving his sister the assurance she would most have wanted. Writing from his lodgings in Eastbourne, where the 27-year-old Gertrude Chataway was staying with him, he presents a carefully worded rebuttal:

I think all you say about my girl-guests is most kind and sisterly, and most entirely proper for you to write to your brother. But I don't think it at all advisable to enter into any controversy about it. There is no reasonable probability that it would modify the views either of you or of me. I will say a few words to explain my views ...

You and your husband have, I think, been very fortunate to know so little, by experience, in your own case or that of your friends, of the wicked recklessness with which people repeat things to the disadvantage of others, without a thought as to whether they have grounds for asserting what they say. I have met with a good deal of misrepresentation of that kind. And another result of my experience is the conviction that the opinion of 'people' in general is absolutely worthless as a test of right and wrong. The only two tests I now apply to such a question as the having some particular girl-friend as a guest are, first, my own conscience, to settle whether I consider it to be entirely innocent and right in the sight of God; secondly, the parents of my friend, to settle whether I have their full approval for what I do. You need not be shocked at my being spoken against. Anybody who is spoken about at all, is sure to be spoken against by somebody: and any action, however innocent in itself, is liable, and not at all unlikely, to be blamed by somebody.

With almost deliberate challenge he added a postscript:

September 22, Weather has quite changed today, and Gertrude has gone off for the morning, having Edith Miller as her companion, to finish a little picture she is making of a bit of the coast.¹⁸

The discursiveness is as obvious as the challenge. He does not tell his sister that the rumours are unfounded or tell her that she would find nothing to disapprove of in his conduct; he says merely that he considers himself free of blame. This man, who thought in the subtlest shades of meaning, must have done this for a reason. An important reality of Dodgson's biography, obscured for so long by the irrelevance of the 'Carroll' myth, is that he not only appeared routinely to flout the conventions of his time, he may have done so in actuality.

It is another curiosity that this bachelor, with his ever-changing 'harem' of female companions and his jokey cynicism about being unable to endure any woman beyond the 'honeymoon', was yet warmly, almost passionately, committed to the idea of the married state. When friends got married he would often send them intimate and very personal advice about what he believed marriage truly meant. 'The very sincere wishes of an old friend that your married life may be a bright and peaceful one,' he wrote to Kate Terry Lewis, about to marry Frank Gielgud, 'and that you and your chosen husband may love each other with a love second only to your love of God

and far above your love of any other object. For that is, I believe, the only essential for a happy married life; all else is trivial compared with it.’¹⁹

On another occasion he echoed these sentiments, only more passionately. ‘I hope and trust dear girl,’ he wrote to Edith Lucy on her engagement:

that you are not deceiving yourself in a matter of so overwhelming importance: that you are not mistaking a passing fancy, or the very natural wish to get settled in life, and to secure a protector and a home, for the genuine love – the absolute surrender of one’s whole being to the love of just one other human being, a love far beyond that felt for any other human being, and only second to the love one must feel for God himself, – without which marriage is only a desecration of holy things and a sin against God.²⁰

Too obviously, he means what he says, and it seems to come from the depths of him. To another newly engaged girl he wrote at about the same time:

Let me add my sincere hope that when you have ... realised what the poet means by ‘two lives bound fast in one,’ you will also realise what he means by ‘golden ease’ – by which I understand not the ease that comes from want of work, but that which comes from absence of vexation and of care, or at least from the thought that, whatever cares may come, they have not to be borne alone.²¹

This passionate conviction about ‘the absolute surrender of one’s whole being to the love of just one other human being’ is a little odd in a middle-aged bachelor with a ‘harem’ of interchangeable female companions. It raises the question: why did this man who believed in marriage so fervently never find a woman he would want to make his wife? His own explanation – about being too easily bored and unable to sustain interest beyond the ‘honeymoon’ – seems a little pat.

Perhaps in order to understand his later life we have to see him as he may have seen himself. Commenting on a friend’s blissful married state, he described himself, with his usual half-humour, as a ‘broken-hearted old bachelor.’ This image of himself, existing like the creature in a poem close to his heart in a state of ‘niggard halfness,’ making a life out of other people’s happiness and the distractions of an endless variety of ‘friendships,’ was one

he returned to again and again in his middle years.²² While still in his late thirties he seems to have wilfully beached himself on the shores of old age; left himself there with thirty or forty years to get through and nothing left to strive for. Perhaps this was in part the phenomenal, unrepeatable, success of his first literary venture. Like Orson Welles after *Citizen Kane* he was faced with the prospect of starting at the top and working his way down. Maybe this had something to do with the vague haunting depression that filled his post-Alice years. But this is not the whole story.

The overwhelming impression of the man in these years is of someone dealing with an overpowering sense of loss or emptiness, who is using other people, not ungenerously, as a means of coping with aspects of his own troubles, seeking distraction in constant variety, unable to settle too long with any one individual or even in any one place. Although he was resident at Christ Church for the remainder of his life, the image of his semi-retired, unvarying routine is mythic. In practice, he remained highly peripatetic, spending anything up to five months of the year in his summer home and travelling extensively about the country, visiting friends and acquaintances, almost as if he feared to stay too long in the same environment with the same company.

His creativity began to suffer from his own inability to be still, to rest awhile without occupation and perhaps, too, from his loss of internal honesty. His brilliance diffused into facile cleverness, leaked away in a unrelenting drizzle of puzzles and wordgames and clever little inventions, as if his only enemy was mental silence. 'Syzygies' and 'pillow problems' distracted and eventually destroyed the genius that created *Alice*. Caught up in the need for perpetual activity of mind or body, like a shark that must swim or die, he could not give himself the quiet, the introspection, on which true creativity feeds. He starved this great gift of his and let it die rather than face the quiet of his own mind. Escape seemed to replace success as the ultimate purpose of his existence. However remarkable this scattering of mind-games, however beneficial to others this restlessness may have eventually proved, the man that could do this to himself cannot be described as entirely happy or well adjusted.

His serious poetry from these years is no longer about love but about an aching nostalgia for what has gone, never to return. 'Around my lonely

hearth tonight / Ghostlike the shadows wander.' Even some of his acrostic poems, playing with names of his girl-friends, are dark, haunted and sad.

Bowed to the earth with bitter woe,
Or laughing at some raree-show,
We flutter idly to and fro.

Dreams that elude the waker's frenzied grasp –
Hands stark and still on a dead mother's breast,
Which never more shall render clasp for clasp.²³

At the same time the House that had been his home for most of his adult life began to exert less and less of a hold on him. Perhaps because the grimly male environment had never really suited him, perhaps for other reasons, over the years that followed he became increasingly detached from the society of his fellow academics and the male friends he had known for years. In 1881 he gave up his Mathematical Lectureship, becoming at last, by default and at a time when his creativity was prematurely waning, a professional writer. Perhaps through inertia he continued to live at Christ Church, although he had no real function there any more and evidently only fitful interest in the place.

He had decided to give himself up entirely to writing and at first welcomed the uninterrupted leisure, with no more teaching chores. But uninterrupted leisure had its own dangers for him now. His talent was waning. Creativity was no longer easy and painless. Time for thought was something he was no longer comfortable with. Not altogether surprisingly, within a year he had taken up another Christ Church post to fill the void. He became Curator of the Senior Common Room; a tedious bureaucrat's job that was truly beneath him and to which his impulsive idiosyncratic nature was entirely unsuited. He was obliged to order wine and spirits for the Senior Common Room's delectation, to oversee the unblocking of lavatories and the installation of adequate lighting. He was, as everyone in such a position always is, the target for everyone's complaints, and his sometimes flippant management style alienated a few, who proceeded to make his life as difficult as possible. But in his own fashion he dealt with the frustrations by satirizing them, printing and circulating articles with mock-heroic titles

such as ‘Twelve Months in a Curatorship, By One Who Has Tried It’, in which he made his feelings obvious.

This book is not a plagiarism – as its name might at first suggest – of ‘Five Years of Penal Servitude’. Nor again is it meant to traverse precisely the same ground as ‘Six Months on the Treadmill’ ... it will be found largely autobiographical ... it will be pervaded with mystery, spiced with hints of thrilling plots, and deeds of darkness.²⁴

He did his job well, in his own way, but remained a semi-detached resident of Christ Church until his death. Increasingly he turned for his comfort and his companionship only to the women he knew and who loved him. In some way he needed them, all of them, to make his life acceptable to him. And he continued to charm them, effortlessly, until the end of his life.

A letter written by one seventeen-year-old meeting him for the first time gives an intense and vivid picture both of the potency of his charm and of the almost formulaic manner in which he, like any old roué, could turn it on. Lottie Rix was the younger sister of one of Dodgson’s mathematical pets. She had never met him before when, out of the blue, he called on her at her convent school.

‘My dearest Mother’, wrote Lottie, the day after the encounter:

Yesterday afternoon there were none of your Minchins or Robinsons for me! I was content with none less than

The Great *Lewis* himself!

I must tell you about it before I answer your letters. I went down to dinner as usual, and was stodging through my meat when the servant put into my hand a Card. I turned pale and read

Rev. C.L. Dodgson
Christ Church, Oxford

I think I was as much horrified as pleased at first. I had on an old everyday blue dress and a filthy apron. But I tore off that, and made myself as respectable as possible and walked with as much calmness as remained to me, to S. Louisa’s room, where he was. The first thing he did after shaking hands with me and asking if I was Miss Rix, was to turn me round and look at my back. I wondered what on earth he was doing, but he said that he had been made to expect a tremendous lot of hair, and that he hadn’t had the least idea what I was like, except that he had a vague vision of hair. We sat down and talked for a few

minutes, and then he wanted to know if I should be allowed to come out with him, and if we were allowed to 'go forth' with friends. I said we were, so then he said, 'Well then, would you go and ask the lady principal (or dragon or whatever you call her), if you may come now?' I went and after a little questioning from S. Louisa got leave. He said he was surprised to see that she would let young ladies go out with any gentleman that called without even coming to see that they *looked* respectable.

He told me he had business with an artist who would give us some dinner. So we started ... I told him Edie [her sister] would be awfully jealous (I hope she is), and he said, 'yes, *won't* there be a row!'. He said he would call some day and take me to see *The Mikado*, but he was afraid that it [would] more than ever 'disturb the domestic peace'.

Dodgson took her to Harry Furniss's studio: 'The whole time I was there, I had to keep telling myself "that's an artist who has a picture in the Academy, and that's Lewis Carroll!"', and from there to the Grosvenor Gallery. He took her back to the care of S. Louisa at about 5.30; early for one of his outings, but this was their first encounter.

I told him I was glad he hadn't found his heart in his boots and he said he didn't think he should be quite so frightened of me next time, and he shouldn't wonder that after he had seen me 3 or 4 times, he would be able to pluck up the courage to call me Lottie ... He had called me Lottie all the time, but no matter, no matter ... It was fun, and I felt like I was dreaming the whole time.

Evidently Lottie was more than a little bowled over, and her mother noticed this, too. She evidently wrote to Dodgson, remarking on how he had set the girl 'at her ease'. Dodgson replied cautiously, deliberately playing down the effect he had had. 'I don't think I did succeed as you think in setting Lottie "at her ease". I feel no doubt that if she had quite felt that, she would have talked more and not merely replied. (She did talk a little.) The pictures were a resource and helped us out a bit.'²⁵

Reading this, and comparing it with Lottie's gushing letter, we must be struck by the likelihood that this downplaying of his own talent was more a device to put to rest any latent anxieties of Mrs Rix's than any kind of realistic assessment of his own experience. Evidently he has spent the afternoon charming and flirting with this girl and is maybe a little nervous of what Mama might make of it. But he need not have worried: like most

Mamas he encountered in these circumstances she was almost as seduced by him as was her daughter, actively offering up both her girls for his unchaperoned society in a strange displacement of appropriate response. In part this is the Carroll legend at work, but beneath that there is the unmistakable capacity he had to be almost universally compelling and attractive to the opposite sex. This manifests again and again, particularly in his later years.

Even those women who had most reason to distrust him fell prey to this aspect of the man. Mrs Mayhew, who was too nervous of social repercussions to allow her older girls to be photographed by him naked, was somehow compelled to try to explain her reluctance, as if she were the sinner and he the sinned against, imploring a moment of his time that she might 'explain away' her objections and being airily dismissed by Dodgson, who concluded that there was 'nothing to say'. One can see the same dangerous moral ascendancy that his father had once exercised, the same ability to make vulnerable others feel that they are automatically in the wrong, but made subtler and stranger here by the romantic and sexual charm that was his particular gift.²⁶

His rather bizarre association with the artist Gertrude Thomson is perhaps another manifestation of this gift. Thomson was a strange woman. Apparently almost pathologically naïve, she made a living out of drawing oddly androgynous fairy-figures for book illustrations, so anodyne that only Christina Rossetti could take offence at them. She was perhaps unaware, or unwilling to be made aware, of the details of sexual differentiation, which led to some odd exchanges when she began to do illustrations for one of Dodgson's books. 'In the "bower" picture, surely the elder child has the form of a girl,' he wrote bemusedly to her on one occasion; '... the breasts are those of a girl, not a boy.' He suggested that she alter the hair to fit in with the breasts, but instead she apparently shaded in the offending bulge and added wings to her hermaphrodite fairy, as if to buttress it against any suggestion of grubby humanity. Wings indeed were her defence against too much reality. 'If ever you fancy any of the pictures to look too like real children, then by all means give them wings,' wrote Dodgson tolerantly, evidently in response to a plea for understanding.

Thomson principally adored not Dodgson himself but his image as 'Carroll', to which she seems to have been almost fanatically devoted. For his part, and most unusually, he seems to have had little interest in her as a person or as a woman. Probably her overt cutesiness was a little too much for him. Her principal value was her willingness to be artist and photographer for him, and in return for these services he played 'Carroll' for her, confiding without any whisper of irony his distaste for mature female forms and his adoration of the sacred child-image. 'I like drawing a child best,' he murmured reassuringly in one letter; '... don't get a grown up model any time you are expecting me.' Thus buttressed by his assurances of almost transcendental purity, she got him models who were actually rather grown up and which he agreed to work with presumably out of the goodness of his heart. It was an oddly symbiotic relationship. Just before he died he took her to the theatre, and after the show one of the actresses, a friend of Dodgson's, sent a little note round to Thomson. It was addressed, rather oddly, to 'Mrs Dodgson'. 'Well, we are certainly labelled now!' said the man beside her, a moment she would not easily forget. 'How we laughed,' she assured her readers, on remembering the incident in print after Dodgson's death. But her words carry little conviction. In her heart she probably longed for a kind of union with him, in which they would sit together into their twilight years admiring the innocent loveliness of little 'nudities' and imagining fairies at the bottom of their garden. We can be fairly sure that he did not share her aspiration.²⁷

But their usage of one another cut both ways. She built an enduring dream on his acquiescent back, and he in his turn accepted her strange lapses, her incompetences and apparent rudenesses with tolerance and good grace. He waited thirteen patient years for her to produce some landscape illustrations for his volume of serious poetry, a kindness she would not have won from many of his contemporary authors. In a way she had her 'marriage', and when he was gone she mourned her Carroll with agonized intensity. This was perhaps his saving grace here: that he was ultimately a generous man, unstinting with his time, his money, his care. In his intimate associations he so often gave as much as he took. For the young women whose beauty and intellect he shamelessly enjoyed he was a generous friend and a wonderful companion. He was, for most of them, an unforgettable and

joyous, even life-changing, experience. From Ethel Rowell, whom he met when she was a seventeen-year-old pupil at the Oxford High School where he occasionally taught logic, he won a splendid tribute. He befriended her in the closing years of his life and, impressed by her evident intellect, took her for private tuition. Although she was never one of his most intimate companions, she left observations about him that show the strength of the impact he had on her young mind.

In the beginning my inveterate docility got in the way: I could find nothing to comment on and my response was limited to a repetitive 'yes ... yes ... I see.' I was ready to accept everything that was put before me. One day, after a long series of such feeble affirmatives Mr Dodgson put down his pen and looking at me with his rather crooked smile, 'You do make the lion and the lamb consort together in your caravanserai, don't you?' he said. I did not understand and thought he was paying me a compliment, so I hastened to say deprecatingly 'Oh, but I'm afraid I don't get on easily with everybody.' He looked at me with his kindest smile and said: 'Well, my dear, let us leave the lamb to fend for itself and get back to our muttons, shall we?'

His words were Greek to me, but ... much later I understood both his criticism of me and the patience with which he so gently withdrew it in the face of my ignorance.

I did not understand, but I realised that he found my shallow receptivity disappointing. And presently I managed ... to halt the flow of passive response ... By his own real wish to know what I was thinking Mr Dodgson compelled me to that independence of thought I had never before tried to exercise ... gradually under his stimulating tuition I felt myself able in some measure to judge for myself ... But while he was urging me to exercise my critical faculties, Mr Dodgson at the same time bestowed on me another gift ... he gave me a sense of my own personal dignity. He was so punctilious, so courteous, so considerate, so scrupulous not to embarrass or offend, that he made me feel that I counted.²⁸

This is a transparently intelligent and honest account of an intensely positive emotional and intellectual experience, and the same is true of most of his friendships. His girls and women were encouraged to be emotional and intellectual beings in their own right, not mere ciphers in the tradition of their time. It was his particular talent to nurture their sense of self-worth, and they emerged from their time with him as strong, confident people set

to make their mark on the world. He was their first lesson in loving and being loved, and he was, it seems, a good one.

What else can one say, for example, about his relationship with the actress Isa Bowman? Her own written memoir of him presents their relationship in the terms of decency appropriate for the time (she did, after all, intend her book for the delight of middle-class children and their parents). Beneath the thin deceit of her claim to pre-pubescence, she describes a relationship of closeness, passion and jealousy. He was fifty-five and she thirteen, on the dangerous cusp of adulthood that so many men find disturbing and compelling, when Dodgson saw her in a play and liked the look of her. She was approaching twenty by the time they spent their last days together.

Her own feelings for him are suggested to be complex and intense and, considering his charisma, they may well have been so. She grew to her full womanhood in intimacy with him, and she could not help but learn about her own sexuality through contact with him. While their society muttered, they walked together, hand in hand, across Christ Church Meadow and the South Downs, shared dark evenings, content with one another's company. When she was confirmed into the Anglican Church at the age of sixteen, and they could take Holy Communion together before his God, he told his private diary that he felt their intimacy had ascended to a new level. This was no small thing for this man to admit. She was his 'darling Isa', and her own eloquent words convey the youthful intensity of her responses to him. 'Now that he is dead ... I can yet feel the old charm, I can still be glad that he has kissed me and that we were friends,' she wrote. 'When the fire-glow ... threw fantastic shadows about the quaint room ... and his eyes lighted on me ... I was conscious of a love and reverence for Charles Dodgson that became nearly adoration.' Whether or not they ever engaged in the technicality of penetrative sex, they were lovers, in almost every sense.

Isa brightened his summer holidays and indeed his winters at Christ Church. He paid for her acting lessons, persuaded his old friend Ellen Terry to give her elocution tips, bought her clothes, persuaded managements to give her work, even adopted her younger sisters as another set of quasi-offspring. He got her big break for her – playing a rather mature and curvy Alice in the stage version of the story. Her career did not look back. No

doubt, in a sense, she was using him and he, perhaps, was using her, but in a mutually beneficial way. By the mid-1890s she did not need him any more and he had other, newer friends, and perhaps not entirely coincidentally they began to drift apart. But before that Dodgson paid her a unique and desperately significant compliment. After spending an unprecedented six weeks together he marvelled to his diary that they were still happy to be together and confided the same in his friend Mary Manners:

When people ask me why I have never married, I tell them I have never met the young lady whom I could endure for a fortnight – but Isa and I got on so well together that I said I should keep her for a month, the length of the honeymoon, and we didn't get tired of each other.

His own wonderment is obvious. And the inclusion of such an observation in his private diary makes it apparent that this inability to survive the 'honeymoon' was not simply an artifice to explain his persistent bachelorhood. It was a genuine psychological block. He was almost fearful of the boredom of spending too long in the company of the same girl or woman. Isa, perhaps alone of all the females that came and went, meant enough to him for his interest in her to survive prolonged exposure. She probably continued to mean something to him for many years. When, some time after they stopped seeing one another, she returned to tell him she was getting married, Dodgson reacted with brief and intense jealousy. He seized the posy of flowers she was wearing at her belt and threw it out of the window. 'You know I can't stand flowers,' he said.²⁹

After his relationship with her decayed in the early 1890s he began his most truly 'promiscuous' period. In the summer of 1893 this 61-year-old entertained at least three different women-friends in his lodgings by the sea in rapid succession and was defiantly unrepentant about doing so. In August he wrote to his old 'child-friend' Gertrude Chataway, now twenty-seven, urging her to join him at Eastbourne:

If you could come ... you would be so welcome! I don't like that friends whom I love should come for less than a week: you hardly settle down to enjoy a visit of only 2 or 3 days ... if you can conveniently come next Saturday, dear girl, come!

She did, sharing lodgings with him. Before she arrived he took another woman, May Miller, on a visit to his sister Henrietta in Brighton. They took the steamer from Eastbourne. The sea was rough, and standing in the prow together they both became soaked to the skin; so wet indeed that they decided against going on to Brighton, and instead Dodgson took the girl back to his own apartment. She thought she perhaps ought to go home, but he urged her to stay and borrowed some dry clothes for her from the maid. They sat down to supper tête-à-tête, 'and she did look so pretty', Dodgson thought. He wrote this account fearlessly in a letter to one of his favourite (and truly child) child-friends, Enid Stevens. We can imagine that the 'indecent' proceedings – a young woman disrobing in a bachelor's apartments, then dining with him alone – were soon widely known in Oxford society and beyond.³⁰

It was shortly after that, in October, that the mother of 23-year-old Marion Richards wrote to Dodgson informing him of her wish that her daughter 'should not dine with me, or even walk with me'. The intensity that informed this particular relationship – for Marion, if not necessarily for him – is shown by what subsequently happened. Marion evidently defied her mother's order and wrote to Dodgson asking to meet him. Apparently he agreed. His diary records the event with almost deliberate mischief: 'Met Marion Richards in street (tho' of course I did not turn and walk with her, that being forbidden!), I was glad of the opportunity of thanking her for her letter and assuring her we are still friends.'³¹

This is evidently an exercise in the purest vanity or a demonstration of how much he needed to keep the love of all these females, even in the most extreme and dangerous circumstances. Whatever the precise truth, it is evident that the Charles of middle and later years had become a creature few mothers would have wanted their nubile, sexually curious daughters to know too well. He was frankly dangerous, however good his heart could be; his charm too excessive, his tongue too plausible, his intent too compromised. Fortunately for his purpose, few people, blinded as they were by the image of 'Carroll', could see this truth.

The Dodgson of the 1890s remained obsessed with the questions of salvation, innocence and, increasingly, death. Although very fit, and far younger than his years, he felt the approach of the end, or at least claimed to,

in his more histrionic moments. He thought increasingly about the life to come and probably what he had to look forward to there. According to his father's teaching he would burn for his sins. This prospect not only caused him personal dread, it disgusted his sense of justice. Why, after all, would a just God be less capable of forgiveness than a human being? He felt passionately about this: 'If I were forced to believe that the God of the Christians were capable of inflicting "eternal punishment" ... then I should give up Christianity.'

At the root of this uncompromising stance was his own experience of sin and the tolerance and understanding this had given him of 'sin' in others, as well as his own enduring sense of personal unworthiness. 'Sin is the one unendurable agony of life,' he wrote in 1889; 'one's own sins crush one to the dust more than all possible sorrows that could come from without.'³² Twenty years after leaving his own sins behind he needed to believe in the continuing possibility of genuine repentance and genuine salvation for any sinner, however steeped in sin, not merely as a source of personal comfort but also as a means of reassuring himself in the inherent justice of the universe. His arguments against atheism show that in his blackest moments he contemplated the awful chaos of a barren and empty cosmos, with no order, no compassion and no love. He feared this – feared his own inclination to believe in it – perhaps more than anything else.

His slightly dramatized but none the less real sense of approaching death urged him to complete things he felt the need to do before he was 'taken': not 'Carroll' works at all but more aspects of Dodgson. For years he had been planning a publication of the poems he had written during his period of guilt. He wanted the volume called *The Valley of the Shadow of Death*, as if indeed he intended it as a statement to posterity. Together with *Sylvie and Bruno*, and intended to be published at about the same time, they constituted his confession of the most formative experience of his life.

In 1893 the final part of the 'companion volume' to that poetry, his last work of fiction, begun twenty years before as a kind of catharsis, was finally published. Critically *Sylvie and Bruno* was derided and understandably so. His genius was dying, smothered by sentimentality, riven by internal chaos. The book was a structural mess. Self-indulgent, repetitive, undisciplined, it was not 'Carroll' at all. It was an exploration of the anxious, angry, funny,

brilliant mind of middle-aged Charles Dodgson. In its bizarre juxtaposition of plangent sentiment, prim moralizing and merciless cynicism it was almost a statement of his own fractured sense of self. Light beams darting from crazed glass. And it was a cryptogram of his greatest pain, pleasure and joy and an explanation perhaps for the odd, restricted, yet apparently libertarian life he had led ever since.

He sent a copy of the book to Lorina Liddell. Whether she read it and, if she did, what she thought of his twin portraits of her we do not know. She and her ailing husband had left Oxford the previous year for retirement, not in Guildford, as Shaberman suggested had been her desire at one time, but in Ascot. The Senior Common Room made a collection for a leaving present for her, some jewels for her hair, and a deputation went to the Deanery to present them to her. Dodgson was conspicuous by his absence, but his friend Vere Bayne, in his private journal, described the moment when the jewels were handed to Lorina. In this dry little discourse, given over almost exclusively to recording the weather, the brief eloquence that illuminates that one moment is quite affecting: 'I took the Diamonds to the Deanery and placed them in Mrs Liddell's hands ... Mr Hassall and I persuaded Mrs L. to fix the Diamonds in her hair. They flashed magnificently.'³³ It was surely a tribute to the woman's powerful attraction, still potent enough to wring a bit of sentiment from an old don thirty years after she had left her prime behind. Perhaps that was why Dodgson preferred not to be there.

The Dodgson of the 1890s ate ever more frugally (although he still enjoyed his drink), grew thin as a result and pushed his body into long, exhausting walks. He preached from the pulpit sometimes, like the unswerving Anglican he so evidently was not. He became increasingly absorbed and obsessed with the idea of truth as a kind of virtue in its own right. His lifelong gift of clear thought and consequent loathing of hypocritical or specious reasoning, his passion for logic, crystallized into an idea that his 'mission' might lie in teaching young people how to think for themselves. *Symbolic Logic*, his last book, was, he told his sister, 'work for God', as if he still could not take his claim to decency for granted. He needed to remind himself all the time that he was at least trying to be a good man.³⁴ His only greed was for the love of girls and women, his hunger for which seemed insatiable, sometimes cruelly so. They continued to come and go –

women he knew and enjoyed for years, women he encountered only once or twice, who are preserved only as a passing reference to an untraceable name. Too many to assess meaningfully, some scarcely individualized to us and maybe even to him; significant more by their sheer number than by anything else.

But at the same time that the final part of *Sylvie and Bruno* came out Dodgson met the woman who was to be one of his most intimate later companions; a true friend rather than a bizarre trophy of his facile predation. Her name was Constance Burch; a winter companion for him and perhaps a worthy one. He was a youthful and charmingly grey-haired sixty-one when he met her; she was a married woman of thirty-eight with three children. She lived in Oxford, while her husband – as shadowy as most of the other spouses in the history of Dodgson's attachments to married women – was Professor of Physics at Reading University and apparently absent from the home a great deal of the time. She was not as strikingly beautiful as most of Dodgson's girl- and women-friends, but she was evidently highly intelligent and independent of spirit, qualities Dodgson never failed to find beguiling in females of any age. She was instrumental in initiating the teaching of English as a second language and, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, she founded Norham Hall as an establishment for teaching English to female students.

She met Dodgson for the first time on 21 April 1893 through his acquaintance with her daughter Irene. A week later she and Irene went to tea in his rooms. He fell ill shortly after this and kept his diary only patchily for a week or two. Mrs Burch is not mentioned in any of the irregular entries, but they obviously continued to meet, and their friendship must have progressed with sureness and speed, for by 20 May he felt able to write and ask her, with practised assurance, to spend a weekend in London with him. The letter of invitation is already affectionate, teasing and informal, the letter of a man on close and trusting terms with a woman.

In discussing any scientific question it is always best to begin with a few axioms, i.e. propositions that cannot be disputed. Here are my axioms.

(1) When I travel, with only so much luggage as I can carry for short distances, I save a good many odd shillings that would otherwise go on cabs and porters ...

(2) Though on pleasure I am bent, I have a frugal mind’.

(3) When, lately, I took Winifred Stevens to town one Saturday ... I lent her a small portmanteau ... In this she managed to pack an evening dress, and all else she needed for her visit. And this I easily carried on our return ...

That is enough of axioms, I think.

Now, I may be able, on June 3rd, or else the 10th ... to make a similar expedition with you, if you can come. Do you think one or both those days will be free? And could Irene and Co. spare you from Saturday morning until Monday evening?

If you can come (as I much hope you will be able) could you manage with that amount of luggage? (If not, never mind).

You would, I hope, allow me to take my usual course of paying all expenses, including your cab down to the station: for I should want you to meet me there at 9 a.m.³⁵

A strange mixture of peremptoriness and gentle teasing, this is the letter of a man who has done this many times before, knows the drill and is used to his lady companions doing as he says. Mrs Burch went with him to London on 28 June. According to Dodgson’s diary, they visited art galleries and the theatre, where they saw Ellen Terry and Henry Irving in *Charles I*. He also makes it clear that they did not go back to Oxford that evening but went on to Guildford, where they spent the night at the house he owned there, returning to Oxford the next day. It is fair to ask why they did this. It certainly was not for convenience: Oxford itself was only a two-hour train journey away, and the service was almost extravagantly good. They could have caught a late train home if they had wanted, but for some reason they chose to spend a night under the same roof, one where they would be observed only by Dodgson’s sisters. If it was anyone but ‘Carroll’ one would probably conclude that the two were beginning an affair; and subsequent developments between Dodgson and Constance certainly support this possibility.

The memoirs of Constance’s daughter Dorothy are quite unique among the sentimental and predictable recollections of so many ‘child-friends’ in providing glimpses of something beyond the anodyne mythology. Although she has her share of the archetypal ‘Lewis Carroll’ stories, which may or may not be true, beyond that her narrative provides an unwitting but very honest view of the close association that existed between Dodgson and her mother.

He was, remembered Dorothy, at the house 'every Sunday'. Constance promised him not to allow his Sunday space to be invaded by any lion-hunters anxious to meet Lewis Carroll; 'Mother said she would never invite anyone to meet him', even though Sunday was the day for 'calling' in Oxford. Dorothy reveals that her emancipated and intelligent mother routinely mended Dodgson's shirts 'and that sort of thing'. And he trusted her to help him with the embarrassing bugbear of his stammer. 'Start again in a whisper,' Constance would say when he became momentarily locked up.³⁶

This is a child's-eye portrait of a close and affectionate relationship. The desperately fragmentary remains of their correspondence seem to tell a similar story. None of Constance's letters to him, and only three of his to her, survive. The first is the one quoted above, dealing with their trip to London together. The second dates from only a few days after the trip, 2 July 1893, but suggests that some intervening correspondence may be missing. 'You have not yet told me whose photo in *Charles I* [the play they saw in London] you would like to have as a memento of our trip,' he says, indicating that they have either written or spoken about preserving such a memory before. The rest of the letter is full of 'in' jokes and references to families and children they both know while containing no direct reference to their own relationship, but in the postscript he invites her to his rooms: 'May I fetch you some day this week at (say) 3.30, for a stroll, tea, dinner, and as much evening as you feel equal to?' he asks; 'I don't *think* we should bore each other to any unendurable extent!'³⁷

Whether Constance visited him that week we do not know, because he filled in his diary for only two of the seven days. And following this suggestive little note there are no surviving letters for almost three years. His diaries record a steady trickle of meetings, and Dorothy's memoirs suggest there may have been a lot more that for one reason or another (as indeed was so evidently the case with his relationship with the Liddells) did not make it into his spasmodic journal. On his birthday, 27 January 1894, he sent Constance one of four pheasants he had received from Lord Percy's estate. On 20 April she dined with him alone in his rooms, and on 26 May she and another lady friend, nineteen-year-old Dolly Baird, went with him to London to see a show. Although he was such a frequent visitor to the home, he apparently continued to have almost no contact with Constance's

husband, and as Dorothy told an interviewer not long before she died he would not have got on with him if he had. In fact, Dodgson's diaries seem to contain only two references to Mr Burch, one under rather odd circumstances.

Three days after the visit to the theatre Mr Burch makes his first entry in the diary in the single-line observation: 'Burch came to dine with me in Hall.'³⁸

Dodgson says nothing about why this man he hardly knew and apparently had little in common with had suddenly come to visit him, but following this encounter Mr Burch's wife disappears from Dodgson's journal for almost exactly a year. It is not too difficult to surmise what kind of civilized exchange may have taken place at the dining-table between Professor Burch and the charming older bachelor who had been entertaining his wife alone in his rooms and paying for her to accompany him on holiday to London.

But Constance did not disappear from the journal for good. After twelve months or so a friendship of a kind was evidently under way again, although there are no more recorded occasions of her spending time with him alone. But his last surviving letter to her, dated 3 May 1896, suggests affection in decline. He has evidently been to see her on one of the Sunday visits Dorothy remembered and has found, for once, lion-hunting visitors in the drawing-room. He has been 'lionized', has hated it and writes to her with barely concealed fury to say that he never wants it to happen again:

You are so evidently *not* aware of how intensely I dislike having anything of my writing made the subject of conversation in the presence of strangers, that I write to tell you, with a view to escaping it on future occasions ... Did you not wonder a little at my introducing, each time that you returned to the subject of the *Snark*, a new topic? It was done in the *hope* of getting away from the subject I disliked!³⁹

It is terse, it is irritated, and only a short while later Mrs Burch disappears from the diary for even longer than twelve months. There are only two more references to her, in June and July 1897, before Dodgson's death. The 'honeymoon', rather longer than with some, was none the less

apparently over. If he had lived, no doubt another name and face, or several names and faces, would have taken her place. But nature had other plans.

The Christmas of 1897 arrived, with his volume of serious poems still not published. He had by now been waiting for more than ten years for the odd and besotted Gertrude Thomson to prepare the illustrations she had promised him. He spent Christmas, as he usually did, at his sisters' home in Guildford. No immediate intimation of mortality seemed to concern him. But on 5 January a telegram arrived from Sunderland announcing the sudden death of his sister Mary's husband Charles Collingwood and asking for him to go north immediately to give comfort and advice. In normal circumstances he would have gone by the first available train, but the family doctor, who was treating him for a feverish cold, warned severely against it. His lungs, after all, tended to be fragile in the winter. Instead he wrote to his sister and her eldest son letters that are illustrative of the man as head of his family.

Dearest Mary,

You know better than I can say it, all that my heart feels for you in your irreparable loss ... I would certainly have come to you if I could have done so with reasonable prudence: but, with a feverish cold, of the bronchial type ... Dr Gabb forbids me.

You will very likely be in need of some ready money: so I enclose £50 'on account'.

My dear Stuart,

I have sent you a message of love and sympathy through your mother. This note is on a business-matter that will not wait.

When my dear father died in 1868, we gave almost *carte blanche* to the undertakers, without any stipulations as to limit of expense. The consequence was a *gigantic* bill – so large that we had great difficulty in getting the authorities at Doctors' Commons to sanction such extravagance.

If I had things to do again, I should say to the undertaker 'now that you know all that is required, I wish you to give me a signal promise that your charges *shall not exceed a stipulated sum* ...'

You and your mother will have to live with the strictest economy: you have no money to throw away.⁴⁰

They are, in fact, his last surviving letters. For the first day or so of his illness he kept himself occupied in his sick room, making notes, doing mathematical games in a little notebook that might have been a Christmas present. But the doctor's anxieties proved swiftly justified as the feverish cold rapidly turned to a raging pneumonia. In his chronically undernourished, overworked state, he had few reserves to fight the infection. The writing in his little book grew shaky and increasingly confused, as his lungs filled with fluid and his temperature soared. They took away his pen, and he wrote for a while with a pencil, an almost illegible scrawl. But a writer was what he was, writing was what he did, had always done, in any crisis that ever befell him.

The death he had anticipated for so long, feared sometimes, almost looked forward to at others, came on the dark, still, cold afternoon of 14 January. He lay quietly, probably no more than semi-conscious through fever and oxygen depletion, when, without warning, the tortured breathing suddenly stopped. The sister who was sitting with him thought that he might be taking a turn for the better and called for the nurse to look at him. It was a vain and foolish hope. However unexpectedly, however prematurely, Charles Dodgson's life was over.

He had written to Gertrude Thomson just before Christmas (perhaps in the vain hope of some word about his pictures): 'Write to me at "The Chestnuts", Guildford, where I shall stay until the middle of January.'

'The middle of January is here,' wrote Thomson bleakly in her elegy. 'But the hand that wrote those words has laid down the magic pen for ever.' There must be almost no chance that Dodgson, even at his most sentimental, could ever have contemplated marrying this woman.⁴¹

With the kind of bare-faced melodrama that art imitates at its peril Henry Liddell, eighty-six and game to the last, died just four days later in his Ascot home. There was a service for him at Christ Church. Dodgson was buried rather more quietly in the Mount Cemetery at Guildford. He asked for a quite simple funeral, 'avoiding all things which are merely done for show, and retaining only what is in the judgement of those who arrange my Funeral, requisite for its decent and reverent performance'.⁴² His religion, if not his life, had always revolted at glossy and empty show.

As we saw at the beginning of this story, Dodgson's death was just a blip in the career of Carroll. In fact, freed from any tie to physical reality, the legend only quickened in its growth. The reality of Dodgson's confused and perhaps ultimately unsatisfactory existence was swiftly forgotten, and all things pertaining to him became irrelevant. His strange friend Gertrude Thomson mourned her beloved fantasy with touching intensity in the pages of *The Gentlewoman* only weeks after she had followed the real coffin and seen it laid in the real chalk soil. The love poems he had waited so long to have published finally appeared later that year with some entirely inappropriate fairy pictures, drawn by Gertrude and originally destined for another book altogether. They were, along with *Sylvie and Bruno*, the story of his own journey, the confession that held the key to his cryptic life. Like the old man in one of those poems he had wanted to 'tell the tale' that 'hidden in his breast hath lain' for so long.⁴³ But already no one was listening. Love, desire, guilt, pain and loss were things no one was prepared to associate with 'Carroll'. Stuart Collingwood's absurd and ultimately deceitful biography outsold the little volume many times over. It told the story people wanted to hear, while the poetry, the pain and the joy of the real life sank swiftly into commercial oblivion. He became the world's favourite saint and then the world's favourite paedophile, and people wrote a lot of books about his being these things.

Lorina outlived both him and her husband by twelve years. She declined to allow her husband's biographer to mention Dodgson's name and died without leaving a single written reference to one of the most celebrated men she had known. Yet, strangely, or perhaps not strangely at all, when Christ Church wanted a photograph of Dodgson to serve as the basis for a memorial painting to hang in the Hall it was Lorina they went to and Lorina who provided what they asked for. She kept photographs of this man she never spoke about.⁴⁴

Of his later women-friends, an astonishing number of those who had known and loved him as single girls remained unmarried throughout their lives. Gertrude Thomson, May Miller, Beatrice Hatch, Ethel Rowell, Edith and Lottie Rix and many more, all died at fairly advanced ages as spinsters. Was he an impossible act to follow, or did some Gothic curse of ultimate loneliness touch the lives of those who knew him best? If the latter, then at

least his darling Isa escaped. Along with her astonishingly ill-favoured sisters she became a theatrical star of the Edwardian stage and married a purveyor of pornography.

Appendix I: Anne Thackeray

Anne Thackeray was born in 1837, the older daughter of the successful novelist William Makepeace Thackeray. Her father died when she was twenty-six, and she and her younger sister Minny began a peripatetic orphan existence, staying with various of their father's friends, including Alfred Tennyson, whose Isle of Wight home, Farringford, became one of the closest things they knew to a safe haven. They spent happy times there, and Anne wrote her *roman-à-clef*, *From an Island*, as a celebration of the place and the people she knew there.

This little book is a 'literary sketch by the young author ... of a few days of life at Dimbola in the Isle of Wight'.¹ Almost all the characters and presumably some of the events are drawn faithfully from Thackeray's personal experience. Her daughter's copy of the book was annotated with the true identities of most of the major characters. 'St Julian' is identified as the artist George Watts, 'Mrs St Julian' as the celebrated photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, 'Lord Ulleskelf' as the poet laureate Tennyson and, most interestingly from our point of view, 'George Hexham' is named as Lewis Carroll. Thackeray herself is identified with the narrator 'Mrs Queenie Campbell', but her intense exploration of the heroine 'Hester's' inner life and experience suggests that she may have invested her personal identity here. It seems likely that both characters represent stages of her existence: herself as the young woman to whom the events occurred, and herself as an older, about-to-be-married woman recalling past experience.

The story takes place during three days in a country house on the Isle of Wight. In part it is an affectionate tribute to the people she loved there, but it is also an exploration of the experience of falling in love: of the pain of rejection, as well as of consummation and happiness. It was begun some time in the late 1860s, put aside for a while and eventually completed in 1877. The dates may be significant. The mid-1860s evidently saw her first meeting with Charles Dodgson, who, as George Hexham, features as the love object of the story. The year of 1877 saw her belated marriage to her much younger cousin Richmond Ritchie. Perhaps the first experience provoked the need to write this story, while the second allowed her to complete it.

Further investigation of the friendship between Dodgson and Anne Thackeray is certainly needed, since they evidently made an impact on one another's life and work to an extent beyond what is generally acknowledged. Dodgson regarded her as the 'one living novelist whose English is *lovely*'² and consciously used her as an inspiration for his own style, while Thackeray made him the centre of a very personal description of love as a rite of passage: a young woman's first encounter with intense emotion and with

the pain of betrayal, an experience that could 'change a lifetime'. Evidently their first recorded meeting in 1869, when Dodgson briefly notes the presence of 'Miss Thackeray' at a dinner party, was not their first actual encounter. By 1869 Thackeray was already writing the novel in which he features so prominently, and the wording of his own diary entry is certainly more consistent with a re-encounter than a first meeting. He does not write 'Miss Thackeray – daughter of the novelist' or give her any other defining characteristic, as he would most certainly have done if they had been strangers. She is merely 'Miss Thackeray', as if he is already acquainted with her.

Everything seems to point to an initial meeting some time in the early or mid-1860s, one apparently unrecorded by either party but maybe significant – to Thackeray at least. She certainly provides an intense exploration of 'George Hexham's' character, one of the most vividly and feelingly drawn word-portraits in the book. The possibility that there was, however briefly, some form of romantic connection between Thackeray and Dodgson that this story is based upon is one that cannot be ruled out. Of course, they did not marry, as Hester and Hexham do, but this part of the story belongs to the need for tidy endings in fiction, and of course in 1877, when the book was being finished, she was at last on the brink of finding the married love for which she had yearned for so long. This episode of happiness and consummation belongs to her later relationship with Ritchie; but did Dodgson, perhaps unintentionally, and in the grip as he was at this time of his own private guilt and pain, bring about in this receptive, highly intelligent and sensitive young woman the beautifully described and analysed shock of love and disillusionment of the earlier chapters? It is curious to note that after having no contact with one another for many years Thackeray contacted Dodgson in 1887, at precisely the time that her ten-year-old marriage was in difficulties, her husband involved with another woman. She wrote to Dodgson and invited him warmly to 'come and dine, and sleep, and renew old acquaintance'.³ Perhaps prudently, Dodgson did not take up the invitation

Thackeray's 'Hexham' is a tall, dark-haired, handsome young amateur photographer from Christ's College, Cambridge, who has arrived on the Isle of Wight with his 'van' of photographic apparatus to take portraits of the celebrated individuals staying there. He is immediately attracted to Hester St Julian, one of the daughters of the house. She is likewise attracted to him but shy and unworldly, and when she fails to respond to his confident advances as he would wish he 'punishes' her by taking up with a lady guest, the man-hungry 'Lady Jane'. His actions confuse and hurt young Hester. It is her first brush with the adult world.

Whatever the reality of Thackeray's connection with Dodgson, the nature of *From an Island's* composition and the author's intention to celebrate real people and real experience means that we ought to pay close attention to her portrait of him, however un-'Carrollian' it might seem to be. It provides the insight of a shrewd and intelligent observer on what Charles Dodgson may have become during this most tormented and

mysterious period of his life. And for this reason an extended extract is reproduced here. *From an Island* is published by Hunnyhill Publications, Newport, Isle of Wight, and this extract appears with their kind permission.

Extract from *From an Island*
by Anne Thackeray

Chapter VIII, pp. 55–7

He must get one more picture, he thought, eating his luncheon thoughtfully, but with good appetite – one more of Hester alone. He determined to try and keep her at home that afternoon.

He followed her as she left the room.

‘You are not going? Do stay,’ said Hexham imploringly: ‘I want you: I want a picture of you all to myself. I told my man we should come back after luncheon.’

Hester coloured up. Her mother’s warning was still in her ears.

‘I – I am afraid I must go,’ she said shyly.

‘What nonsense!’ cried Hexham, who was perfectly unused to contradiction, and excited by his success. ‘I shall go and tell your mother that it is horrible tyranny to send you off with that *corvée* of children and women, and that you want to stay behind. Lady Jane would stay if I asked her.’

Hester did not quite approve of this familiar way of speaking. She drew herself up more and more shyly and coldly.

‘No thank you,’ she said. ‘Mamma lets me do just as I like. I had rather go with the others.’

‘In that case,’ said Hexham, offended, ‘I shall not presume to interfere.’ And he turned and walked away ...

Hexham was so unused to being opposed that his indignation knew no bounds. He first thought of remaining behind, and showing his displeasure by a haughty seclusion. But Lady Jane happened to drive up with Aileen in the pony-carriage she had hired, feathers flying, gauntleted, all prepared to conquer.

‘Won’t you come with us, Mr Hexham?’ she said, in her most gracious tone.

After a moment’s hesitation, Hexham jumped in, for he saw Hester standing not far off, and he began immediately to make himself as agreeable as he possibly could to his companion. It was not much that happened that afternoon, but trifles show which way the wind is blowing. Lady Jane and her cavalier went first, the rest of us followed in Mrs St Julian’s carriage ...

As far as Lady Jane and Hexham and Aileen were concerned, the expedition seemed successful enough: they laughed and chattered and laughed again ... Lady Jane seemed quite well pleased with her companion and evidently expected his homage all to herself. I could have shaken her for being so stupid. Could she not see that not one single word he spoke was intended for her. Every one of Hexham’s arrows flew straight to the heart for which they were intended. It was not a very long walk – perhaps half an hour in duration – but half an hour is long enough to change a lifetime, to put new meaning to all that has passed, and to all that is yet to come. People may laugh at such things as *désillusionnement*, but it is a very real and bitter thing, for all that people may say. To some constant natures certainty and unchangeableness are the great charm, the

whole meaning of love. Hester, suddenly bewildered and made to doubt, would freeze and change and fly at a shadow, where Hester once certain would endure all things, bear and hope and forgive. I could see that Hexham did not dislike a little excitement: *l'imprévu* had an immense charm for him. He was rapid, determined: so sure of himself that he could afford not to be sure of others. Hexham's tactics were very simple ...

He loved Hester. Of this he had no doubt, but he had no idea of loving a woman as Shakespeare, for instance, was content to love ... 'Being your slave, what should I do but wait?' This was not in Hexham's philosophy. Hester had offended him, and he had been snubbed; he would show her his indifference, and punish her for his punishment.

Chapter IX, pp. 61–9

The day had begun well and brightly, but there was a jar in the music that evening, which was evident to most of us ... Altogether it was a dismal disjointed evening, during which a new phase of Hexham's character was revealed to us, and it was not the best or the kindest. There was a hard look in his handsome face and sceptical tone in his voice. He seemed possessed by what the French call *l'esprit moqueur*. Hester, pained and silenced at last, would scarcely answer him when he spoke. Her father with an effort got up and took a book and began to read something out of one of Wordsworth's sonnets ...

Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart,
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea.

'I hate Wordsworth. He is always preaching,' said Hexham, as St Julian ceased reading. 'I never feel so wicked as when I am being preached at.'

'I am sorry for you,' said St Julian drily, 'I have never been able to read this passage of Wordsworth without emotion since I was a boy, and first found it in my school-books.'

Hester had jumped up and slipped out of the room while this discussion was going on ... drew herself up and said a haughty goodnight to Hexham as she passed him ...

Hexham seemed unconscious enough. 'I shall be quite ready for sitters to-morrow morning, Miss Hester,' said the provoking young man cheerfully. 'You won't disappoint me again.'

Hester did not answer and walked out of the room.



Hexham was, as I have said, a young man of an impatient humour. He was a little hard as young men are apt to be. But there was something reassuring in his very hardness and faith in himself and his own doings. It was reassuring because it was a genuine expression of youthful strength and power. No bad man could have had that perfect confidence which marked most of George Hexham's sayings and doings. His was, after all, the complacency of good intentions ...

Hester had sunk wearily in the chair in which she had been sitting, leaning her head upon her hand. She thought it was all over: Hexham was gone. 'She did not care,' she said to herself: as people say they do not care, when they know in their heart of hearts that they have but to speak to call a welcome answering voice, to put out their hand for another hand to grasp. They do not say so when all is really gone, and there is no answer anywhere ... Hester was indignant to think of the possibility of having been laughed at and made a play of when she herself had come with a heart trusting and true

and tender. He could not care for Lady Jane, but he had ventured to say more than he really felt to Hester herself. Now it seemed to her the whole aim and object of her behaviour should be to prevent Hexham from guessing what she had foolishly fancied – Hexham, who had come back, and who was standing looking with keen doubtful glances into her face ...

‘Hester,’ he said once again, and stopped short, hearing a step at the door. Poor Hester blushed up crimson, with blushes that she blushed for again. Had she betrayed herself? Ah, no, no! She started up. ‘I must go,’ she said. Ah, she would go to her father. There was love, tender, and generous love, to shield and protect, to help her: not love like this, that was but play, false, cruel, ready to wound.

‘Dear Hester, don’t go! Stay!’ Hexham entreated, as she began to move towards the door leading to her father’s studio. He had not chosen his time well, poor fellow, for Lady Jane, who was still in the outer studio, hearing his voice, came to the door, looked in for one instant, and turned away with an odd expression on her face and a brisk shrug of her shoulders. They both saw her. Hester looked up once again, with doubtful questioning eyes, and then there was a minute’s silence. Hexham understood her: a minute ago he had been gentle, now her doubts angered him.

‘Why are you so hard to me?’ he burst out at last, a little indignantly, and thoroughly in earnest. ‘How can you suppose I have ever fancied that odious woman? Will you believe me or not, when I tell you how truly and devotedly I love and admire you? You are the only woman I have ever seen whom I would make my wife. If you send me away you will crush all that is best and truest in my nature, and destroy my only chance of salvation’ ...

‘How can I trust you?’ said proud Hester, ‘after yesterday – after – No. you do not really care for me ...’

Appendix II: Dodgson's Love Poetry, 1859–68

What follows are extracts from the love poetry that Dodgson wrote between 1859 and 1868, the only love poetry he produced throughout his life. All but one of the poems quoted first saw the light of day in *College Rhymes*, a university publication, and all but one were signed with the very personal pen name 'CLD, Christ Church,' something almost unknown in all the other varied work he produced throughout his life. Some of Dodgson's love poetry is mediocre, but some, like 'Stolen Waters,' has a lyrical power and technical skill that have been overlooked for too long, and all of it is honest, providing, even at its most rambling and self-indulgent, a rare insight into his mind and heart during this strange and troubled period of his life.

The Dream of Fame

(published in College Rhymes, October 1861)

He saw her once, and in the glance
A moment's glance of meeting eyes,
His heart stood still in sudden trance
He trembled with a sweet surprise –
As one that caught through opening skies
A distant gleam of Paradise.

That summer eve his heart was light
With lighter step he trod the ground
And life was fairer in his sight
And music was in every sound
He blessed the world where there could be
So beautiful a thing as she.

But days went by – he found her not;
And years rolled on – she never came;
Though ever round the fatal spot
A mocking whisper of her name
In hollow whispers seemed to roll
Through the dark chambers of his soul.

From land to land he sought her face;
To him were neither night nor day;
The phantom he was doomed to chase
Still glided from his touch away;
And life that once had been so bright
Seemed but a dream of yesternight.

So after many years he came
A wanderer from a distant shore:
The street, the house, were still the same,
But those he sought were there no more;
His burning words, his hopes and fears,
Unheeded, fell on alien ears.

Only the children from their play
Would pause the mournful tale to hear,
Shrinking in half-alarm away,
Or step by step would venture near,
To touch with timid curious hands
That strange wild man from other lands.

He sat beside the busy street
There, where he last had seen her face;
And thronging memories, bitter-sweet
Seemed yet to haunt the ancient place:
Her footfall ever floated near:
Her voice was ever in his ear.

He sometimes as the daylight waned
And evening mists began to roll
In half soliloquy complained
Of that black shadow in his soul
And blindly fanned with cruel care
The ashes of a vain despair.

The summer fled; the lonely man
Still lingered out the lessening days;
Still as the night drew on, would scan
Each passing face with closer gaze,
Till sick at heart he turned away,
And sighed, 'She will not come today.'

So by degrees his spirit bent
To mock its own despairing cry
In stern self torture to invent
New luxuries of agony,
And people all the vacant space
With visions of her perfect face:

That perfect face whose smile to own
Men dare to live and fools to die,
Dearer than wealth or power or throne,
Sweeter than sweetest harmony:

That oftenest cheers their lonely lot
Who live their life and heed it not.

The heavy hours of night went by,
And silence quickened into sound,
And light slid up the eastern sky,
And life began its daily round.
But light and life for him were fled:
His name was numbered with the dead.

CLD, Christ Church

Rewritten as:

Three Sunsets

(November 1861)

He saw her once, and in the glance
A moment's glance of meeting eyes,
His heart stood still in sudden trance
He trembled with a sweet surprise –
All in the waning light she stood
The star of perfect womanhood.

That summer eve his heart was light
With lighter step he trod the ground
And life was fairer in his sight
And music was in every sound
He blessed the world where there could be
So beautiful a thing as she.

There once again, as evening fell
And stars were peering overhead,
Two lovers met to bid farewell:
The western sun gleamed faint and red
Lost in a drift of purple cloud
That wrapped him like a funeral shroud.

Long time the memory of that night –
The hand that clasped, the lips that kissed,
The form that faded from his sight
Slow sinking through the tearful mist –
In dreamy music seemed to roll
Through the dark chambers of his soul.

So after many years he came
A wanderer from a distant shore:
The street, the house, were still the same,
But those he sought were there no more;
His burning words, his hopes and fears,
Unheeded, fell on alien ears.

Only the children from their play

Would pause the mournful tale to hear,
Shrinking in half-alarm away,
Or step by step would venture near,
To touch with timid curious hands
That strange wild man from other lands.

He sat beside the busy street
There, where he last had seen her face;
And thronging memories, bitter-sweet
Seemed yet to haunt the ancient place:
Her footfall ever floated near:
Her voice was ever in his ear.

He sometimes as the daylight waned
And evening mists began to roll
In half soliloquy complained
Of that black shadow in his soul
And blindly fanned with cruel care
The ashes of a vain despair.

The summer fled; the lonely man
Still lingered out the lessening days;
Still as the night drew on, would scan
Each passing face with closer gaze,
Till sick at heart he turned away,
And sighed, 'She will not come today.'

So by degrees his spirit bent
To mock its own despairing cry
In stern self torture to invent
New luxuries of agony,
And people all the vacant space
With visions of her perfect face.

Then for a moment she was nigh;
He heard no step, but she was there;
As if an angel suddenly
Were bodied from the viewless air,
And all her fine ethereal frame

Should fade as swiftly as it came.

So half in Fancy's sunny trance,
And half in Misery's aching void,
With set and stony countenance
His bitter being he enjoyed,
And thrust for ever from his mind
The happiness he could not find.

As when the wretch in lonely room
To selfish death is madly hurled,
The glamour of that fatal fume
Shuts out the wholesome living world –
So all his manhood, strength and pride
One sickly dream had set aside.

Yea brother and we passed him there
But yesterday, in merry mood
And marvelled at the lordly air
That shamed his beggar's attitude
Nor heeded that ourselves might be
Wretches as desperate as he

Who let the thought of bliss denied
Make havoc of our life and powers
And pine in solitary pride
For peace that never shall be ours,
Because we will not work and wait
In trustful patience for our fate.

And so it chanced once more that she
Came by the old familiar spot;
The face that he would have died to see
Bent o'er him, and he knew it not;
Too rapt in selfish grief to hear,
Even when happiness was near.

And pity filled her gentle breast
For him that would not stir nor speak;

The dying crimson of the West
That faintly tinged his haggard cheek,
Fell on her as she stood, and shed
A glory round the patient head.

Ah, let him wake! The moments fly;
This awful tryst may be the last;
And see, the tear that dimmed her eye
Had fallen on him e'er she passed –
She passed: the crimson paled to gray
And hope departed with the day.

The heavy hours of night went by,
And silence quickened into sound,
And light slid up the eastern sky,
And life began its daily round.
But light and life for him were fled:
His name was numbered with the dead.

Stolen Waters

(9 May 1862)

The light was faint, and soft the air
That breathed around the place;
And she was lithe and tall and fair,
And with a wayward grace
Her queenly head she bare –

With glowing cheek, with gleaming eye,
She met me on the way;
My spirit owned the witchery
Within her smile that lay;
I followed her, I know not why.

The trees were thick with many a fruit,
The grass with many a flower;
My soul was dead, my tongue was mute
In that accursed hour.

And in my dream, with silvery voice
She said or seemed to say
‘Youth is the season to rejoice’ –
I could not say her nay,
I could not choose but stay.

She plucked a branch above her head
With rarest fruitage laden.
‘Drink of the juice, Sir Knight,’ she said,
’Tis good for knight and maiden.’

Oh blind my eyes that would not trace:
Oh deaf my ear that would not heed –
The mocking smile upon her face,
The mocking voice of greed!

I drank the juice and straightway felt
A fire within my brain:

My soul within me seemed to melt
In sweet delirious pain.

‘Sweet is the stolen draught,’ she said:
‘Hath sweetness stint or measure?
Pleasant the secret hoard of bread:
What bars us from our pleasure?’

‘Yea, take we pleasure while we may,’
I heard myself replying.
In the red sunset far away
My happier life was dying:
My heart was sad, my voice was gay.

And unawares, I know not how,
I kissed her dainty finger tips,
I kissed her on the lily brow,
I kissed her on the false, false lips –
That burning kiss, I feel it now!

‘True love gives true love of the best:
Then take,’ I cried, ‘my heart to thee!’
The very heart from out my breast
I plucked, I gave it willingly.
Her very heart she gave to me –
Then died the glory from the west.

In the gray light I saw her face,
And it was withered old and gray:
The fruits were rotting in their place
The flowers were fading where we lay,
Were fading with the fading day.

Forth from her, like a hunted deer,
Through all that ghastly night I fled,
And still behind me seemed to hear
Her fierce unflagging tread,
And scarce drew breath for fear.

Yet marked I well how strangely seemed

The heart within my breast to sleep:
Silent it lay, or so I dreamed,
With never a throb or leap

For hers was now my heart, she said,
The heart that once had been my own,
And in my breast I bore instead
A cold cold heart of stone;
So grew the morning overhead.

The sun shone downward through the trees
His old familiar flame.
All ancient sounds upon the breeze
From copse and meadow came –
But I was not the same.

They call me mad: I smile, I weep
Uncaring how or why
Yea, when one's heart is laid asleep,
What better than to die?

To die! To die? And yet,
I drink of Life today
Deep as the thirsty traveller drinks
Of fountain by the way.
My voice is sad, my heart is gay.

When yestereve was on the wane
I heard a clear voice singing
So sweetly that, like summer rain,
My happy tears came springing:
My human heart returned again.

*A rosy child –
Sitting and singing in a garden fair;
The joy of hearing, seeing;
The simple joy of being –
Or twining roses in the golden hair
That ripples free and wild*

*A sweet pale child –
Wearily looking to the purple west –
Waiting the great Forever
That suddenly shall sever
The cruel chains that hold her from her rest –
By earth joys unbeguiled.*

*An angel-child –
Gazing with living eyes on a dead face –
The mortal form forsaken,
That none may now awaken –
That lieth painless, moveless in her place,
As though in death she smiled.*

*Be as a child –
So shalt thou sing for very joy of breath.
So shalt thou wait thy dying
In holy transport lying –
So pass rejoicing through the gate of Death
In garment undefiled.*

Then call me what they will, I know
That now my soul is glad:
If this be madness, better so:
Far better to be mad,
Weeping or smiling as I go.

For if I weep, it is that now
I see how deep a loss is mine,
And feel how brightly round my brow
The coronal might shine,
Had I but kept my early vow –

And if I smile, it is that now
I see the promise of the years –
The garland waiting for my brow,
That must be won with tears –
With pain – with death – I care not how.

CLD, Christ Church

The Valley of the Shadow of Death

(April 1868)

Hark, *said the dying man, and sighed,*
To that complaining tone,
Like sprite condemned at eventide
To walk the world alone.
At sunset when the air is still
I hear it creep from dale and hill;
It breathes upon me dead and chill
A moment, and is gone.

My son, it minds me of a day
Left half a life behind,
That I have prayed to put away
For ever from my mind;
But bitter memory will not die:
It haunts my soul when none is nigh:
I hear its whisper in the sigh
Of that complaining wind.

And now in death my soul is fain
To tell the tale of fear
That hidden in my breast hath lain
Through many a weary year:
Yet time would fail to utter all –
The evil spells that held me thrall,
And thrust my life from fall to fall,
Thou needest not to hear.

The spells that bound me with a chain
Sin's stern behest to do
Till Pleasure's self, invoked in vain,
A heavy burden grew –
Till from my spirit's fevered eye
A hunted thing I seemed to fly,
Through the dark woods that underlie

Yon mountain-range of blue.

Deep in those woods I found a vale
No sunlight visiteth
Nor star, nor wondering moonbeam pale:
Where never comes the breath
Of summer breeze – there in my ear
Even as I lingered half in fear
I heard a whisper cold and clear
‘That is the gate of Death.’

‘Oh bitter is it to abide
In weariness alway:
At dawn to sigh for eventide
At eventide for day,
Thy noon hath fled: thy sun hath shone:
The brightness of thy day is gone:
What need to lag and linger on
Till life be cold and gray?

‘Oh well,’ it said, ‘beneath yon pool,
In some still cavern deep,
The fevered brain might slumber cool,
The eyes forget to weep:
Within that goblet’s mystic rim
Are draughts of healing stored for him
Whose heart is sick, whose sight is dim
Who prayeth but to sleep!’

The evening-breeze went moaning by
Like mourner for the dead,
And stirred with shrill complaining sigh
The tree-tops overhead:
My guardian angel seemed to stand
And mutely wave a warning hand –
With sudden terror all unmanned
I turned myself and fled!

A cottage gate stood open wide

Soft fell the dying ray
On two fair children side by side,
That rested from their play.
Together bent the earnest head
As ever and anon they read
From one dear Book – the words they said
Come back to me today.

Like twin cascades on mountain-stair
Together wandered down
The ripples of the golden hair,
The ripples of the brown,
While through the tangled silken haze
Blue eyes looked forth in eager gaze
More starlike than the gems that blaze
About a monarch's crown.

My son, there comes to each an hour
When sinks the spirit's pride;
When weary hands forget their power
The strokes of Death to guide:
In such a moment, warriors say,
A word the panic-rout may stay,
A sudden charge redeem the day
And turn the living tide.

I could not see, for blinding tears
The glories of the West;
A heavenly music filled mine ears,
A heavenly peace my breast.
“Come unto Me, Come unto Me –
All ye that labour, unto Me –
Ye heavy-laden, come to Me,
And I will give you rest.

The night drew onward: thin and blue
The evening mists arise,
To bathe the thirsty land in dew,
As erst in paradise,

While over silent field and town
The deep blue vault of Heaven looked down;
Not, as of old, with angry frown,
But bright with angels' eyes.

Blest day! Then first I heard the voice
That since has oft beguiled
These eyes from tears, and bid rejoice
This heart with anguish wild.
Thy mother, boy, thou hast not known;
So soon she left me here to moan;
Left me to watch and weep, alone,
Our one beloved child.

Though parted from my aching sight
Like homeward-speeding dove,
She passed into the perfect light
That floods the world above;
Yet our twin spirits, well I know –
Though one abide in pain below –
Love, as in summers long ago,
And evermore shall love.

So with a glad and patient heart
I move toward mine end;
The streams that flow a while apart
Shall both in ocean blend.
I dare not weep: I can but bless
The Love that pitied my distress,
And lent me, in life's wilderness
So sweet and true a friend.

But if there be – O if there be
A truth in what they say,
That angel-forms we cannot see
Go with us on our way;
Then surely she is with me here;
I dimly feel her spirit near –
The morning mists grow thin and clear

And Death brings in the day.

Appendix III: The ‘Cut Pages in Diary’ Document

(reproduced from <http://lewiscarroll.cc/cutpagesindiarydoc.html>)

Despite its small size, the ‘cut pages in diary’ document is potentially one of the more significant recent discoveries in Carroll’s biography, as it helps provide a partial answer for one of the most enduring mysteries of his life. The document was brought to light in 1996 when I came across it in the Dodgson family archive, where it had been – numbered and catalogued but apparently unnoticed by any scholar or researcher – for some fifteen years. It measures about five inches by three and is torn rather inaccurately from what appears to be an accounts book.

The recto side (Side One) is headed ‘Cut Pages in Diary’ and contains summaries of the contents of two of the seven missing text pages from Dodgson’s diaries, plus a third that is not missing but which has had its contents scribbled over in an attempt at erasure. The most significant of these summaries – and the one that makes the document so valuable – is the one titled ‘Vol 8 page 92’, as this describes the contents of the ‘crucial’ missing page for 27 June 1863, which had long been the subject of considerable speculation as it appears to cover an apparent interruption of the relationship between Dodgson and the Liddell family. Before the discovery of this document this interruption was assumed to have been caused by some aspect of Dodgson’s supposed passion for Alice Liddell, but it now seems this was not the case.

The verso side (Side Two) is filled with notations about the Liddell family in several different hands and has evidently been added to over a considerable period of time – at least twenty years.

The question of why this document exists is quite hard to answer; why did someone in the Dodgson family cut out or deface these three pages of diary text – and then make a note of what was written there? The one thing we can be reasonably sure of is that it was never intended to become publicly known. Presumably they felt the need to preserve some private reminder of what had been written on the pages they were removing, and they evidently kept it carefully for some time, using it occasionally to make notes about the Liddell family on the back. Perhaps its small size led to it becoming accidentally mixed up with other papers that were being deposited in the public archive. But, whatever its origins, it gives us a rare and unique insight both into the curious manner in which the Dodgson family handled the memory and estate of Lewis Carroll and into one of the most mysterious events of the man’s life.

SIDE ONE

This side of the document seems to have been written around the time of the centenary of Lewis Carroll’s birth in 1932. It summarizes the contents of three specific pages from

Dodgson's diaries, the last two of which are now missing, while the first has been defaced with black ink. The summaries were presumably written just before the pages were cut out in order to preserve some reminder for the family of what was being removed. For some reason, after making the list, the perpetrators decided not to cut one of the pages out after all and simply tried to blot out the offending content. The handwriting appears to be that of Violet Dodgson, who was co-guardian of the diaries with her sister Menella from the early 1930s to the late 1960s. The handwriting of the two sisters was very similar, but the formation of the letter 'g' in this document seems closer to Violet's style than to Menella's.

To look at the contents in more detail:

Paragraph One

Vol 8 page 72. Alice not improved by being laid up

This paragraph refers to a page that was not cut out after all; instead, the brief entry has been scrubbed over with black ink in an attempt to obscure it. The actual entry reads:

At five I went to see Alice, who is laid up with a sprained leg, and staid about an hour with her and Rhoda. Alice was in an unusually imperious and ungentle mood, by no means improved by being a invalid

We can see from this that the summary in the 'cut pages' document is quite accurate, although somewhat briefer, and this might give us an important guide to the accuracy of the other summaries of pages that no longer exist. Why the Dodgson sisters wanted to remove this unflattering commentary on Alice isn't clear, other than in the context of preserving the legendary idea of Dodgson's uncritical adoration of her.

Paragraph Two

Vol 8 page 92. LC learns from Mrs Liddell that he is supposed to be using the children as a means of paying court to the governess – He is also supposed [unreadable] to be courting Ina

This is the paragraph that makes the 'cut pages' document so significant. It's a summary of the most famous missing page in Dodgson's diaries – the infamous one covering 27–29 June 1863. It has always been evident from the surrounding text that this missing page covered some form of crisis in Dodgson's relationship with the Liddell family, as he afterwards records 'holding aloof' from them for several months, suggesting at least that relations had suddenly become strained in some way. This page's possible content has therefore been the subject of immense speculation for many years, mostly centring on the idea that it had been about some unfortunate aspect of

Dodgson's relationship with Alice Liddell. The most popular assumption being that Dodgson had offended the family by proposing marriage to the eleven-year-old girl.

The 'cut pages' document provides the first ever documentation of what actually happened on that day, and it shows something quite surprising and unexpected. Far from proposing to eleven-year-old Alice, Dodgson was apparently confronted by Mrs Liddell with gossip concerning him and the governess (Mary Prickett) and 'Ina' (the pet name of Alice's older sister, Lorina). It was presumably this confrontation with Mrs Liddell that caused him to 'hold aloof' from the family.

Examination of the remaining stump of the page in Dodgson's diary suggests the original entry took up the whole page and was therefore probably much longer and more detailed than the brief note we have. In many ways the cryptic summary of events raises more questions than it answers. Did Mrs Liddell take offence, or did they simply agree that he should stay away for a while, and is this why he was 'holding aloof', at least in public, some months later? Were there any grounds for the gossip concerning the governess or Ina? Did the original diary entry refer to 'Ina' or to 'Lorina'? That question is crucial, as 'Lorina' was also the name of Alice's mother – which raises further ambiguous possibilities.

The 'unreadable' portion has been suggested to be 'by some', which does make grammatical sense yet does not seem to fit very closely with the characters as written.

Paragraph Three

Vol 11 page 110 – is about SHD

'SHD' is Dodgson family shorthand for Lewis Carroll's younger brother Skeffington. He seems to have had something of a tendency to get himself into odd or embarrassing situations. There are other episodes recorded in which Dodgson was obliged to rescue Skeffington from various peculiar situations, and on one occasion he even confided that his brother appeared to be acting as if 'deranged'. Presumably this cut page recorded yet another such incident, perhaps more sensitive or embarrassing than the others.

Paragraph Four

Does any one know what the 'business with Lord Newry' was which put LC out of 'Mrs Liddell's good graces'?

This note added to the end of the document refers to an entry from Dodgson's diaries dating from the previous October (1862), when Dodgson recorded about Mrs Liddell:

I have been out of her good graces ever since Lord Newry's business

Lord Newry was an undergraduate at Christ Church at the time and apparently one of Mrs Liddell's favourites. No one presently knows (any more than the author of the document apparently knew) what 'Lord Newry's business' was or how it affected Dodgson's relationship with Mrs Liddell. There has been a suggestion it had to do with a college ball that was apparently running into some controversy at the time, but, although Dodgson records discussing it with Newry a few months earlier, there is nothing to suggest it had any bearing on this or that he and Newry were in any way on opposite sides about it (in fact their conversation as recorded by Dodgson implies they were both quite neutral) or that it was leading to any estrangement between him and Newry or Mrs Liddell. So there seems no reason to believe this is what Dodgson meant by 'Lord Newry's business'. Currently the episode remains a mystery.

Why the writer has added this inquiry on to the end of the document is equally unknown. The implication seems to be that there was some reference to Lord Newry on one of the cut pages (presumably the one for 27 June 1863, as the other one doesn't seem to be about Mrs Liddell or even Dodgson directly), implying he may have been involved in some fashion in whatever it was that led to Dodgson 'holding aloof' for a while. The Liddell family had recently taken a holiday near Newry's estates in north Wales, and this has led to some speculation that he was being seen as a potential suitor for Ina or even that he was Mrs Liddell's lover, but nothing is known in support of either idea.

SIDE TWO

The verso side is headed 'Liddells' and consists of twenty-one lines of handwritten biographical notes concerning the Liddell family in the first half of the twentieth century. The handwriting contains specimens that appear to be from Violet again, as well as her sister Menella and their nephew Philip Dodgson Jaques.

The notes contain nothing of particular significance in themselves, simply a record of births and deaths; their significance is that they allow us to date the creation and evolution of the document as a whole with reasonable accuracy (a recent suggestion made in the *Times Literary Supplement* that this document was written by one person, Philip Jaques, in quite recent times is quite improbable, if not impossible, as we show below).

Line 6 of the verso side contains the note:

Rhoda (unmarried) – still alive.

While line 16 contains this (written in green ink):

Alice's son C. L. Hargreaves died on Nov 26th 1955.

Rhoda was Alice's younger sister, and we know that she died in 1949. So we can conclude that the earlier part of these notes – in which she is described as being 'still alive' must have been written before 1949, while the notes about the death of Alice's son – must have been written at least *six years* later, after his death in 1955. This implies a fairly lengthy period in which the note was being added to by the family. But, in fact, we can be more precise than this in dating the start of the document's composition. Line 1 and 2 of the Liddell biographical notes reads:

Lorina (Ina) married Mr Skene Feb. 1874 – died Oct 1930.

Ina was Alice's older sister, and this shows the notes were begun after her death in October 1930. However line 3 reads:

Alice was born May 1852,

with no date of death, thus implying she was still alive when the notes were being made. This is further emphasised by lines 13–14 which read:

Mrs Hargreaves' [Alice's married name] address is ...

which seems unambiguously to imply that she was definitely alive when this note was written, since a dead woman would hardly be referred to as having an address. Alice Hargreaves (née Liddell) died in 1934, so it would seem this section of the notes was written *before* that event but after the death of Ina.

So, we have a date for the first composition of the document of between late 1930 and 1934, and a date for the final note (the only one to be written in green ink) of post-1955. Meaning, the document was kept and updated by various members of the family over a period of at least twenty-one years and possibly longer.

THE HANDWRITING

The handwriting of the earlier portion seems – as on the recto side – to be mainly that of Violet Dodgson; however, from about line 11 ('Rhoda L.'s address ...') onwards they may be written by her sister Menella. The notes that can be identified as being added after 1955 (line 16 onwards; 'Alice's son C.L. Hargreaves ...') are not only distinguished by being in a bright-green ink, they also seem to be in a different hand. To confirm this, when the document was shown to Lewis Carroll's great-nephew Philip Jaques in 1996, he identified this portion as being his own handwriting.

The two missing, the contents of which are recorded on this bizarre document, are the only ones to be removed in a very distinctive, choppy manner, as if snipped out with nail scissors. The remaining five are razored out in a very neat and methodical way. This distinction seems to strengthen the idea that at least two different people cut out the pages at different times. So, while Violet and Menella can seemingly be

implicated in removing the two pages recorded in this document – and in defacing the scribbled-out page – they can't necessarily be supposed to have removed *all* the pages now missing.

A RECENT DEVELOPMENT

In a recent article in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Professor Morton Cohen claimed that he had known of the 'cut pages in diary' document for many years before I published it (although he had never referenced it in any of his published work or, apparently, mentioned it to any other scholar). In the article he claimed that the entire thing was written by Lewis Carroll's nephew Philip Dodgson Jaques.

This claim by Cohen creates some problems and anomalies. As noted above, the later, post-1955 notes about Caryl's death, written in green ballpoint, do indeed seem to be in the hand of Philip Jaques, and Jaques acknowledged that it was his handwriting when I showed him the document in 1996. However, the earlier notes do not seem to be in his hand, and when Jaques was shown the document he did not say he had written them.

Cohen's claim therefore seems very improbable for these and indeed for other reasons. For his assertion that he had known of the document for at least thirty years to be taken seriously he does need to explain why he did not refer to it in any of his published work – even when dealing directly with the question of the missing pages. Until he can do so, serious doubt must exist over the veracity of his claims.

Notes

Citations in the notes are by author (and date where more than one book by the same author appears in the bibliography), with the exception of the following abbreviations:

Collected Works – *The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll*, with an introduction by Alexander Woollcott, London: Nonesuch Press, 1939

Diaries – *Lewis Carroll's Diaries*, Edward Wakeling (ed.), 9 vols, Luton: Lewis Carroll Society, 1993–7

Int & Rec – Morton N. Cohen (ed.), *Lewis Carroll: Interviews and Recollections*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989

Letters – Morton N. Cohen (ed.), *The Letters of Lewis Carroll*, 2 vols, London: Macmillan, 1979

Introduction

1. Virginia Woolf, *The Moment and Other Essays* (1948), quoted in Phillips, p. 78; Thomas 1996, p. 13.
2. Cohen, 1995, pp. 340, 530.
3. Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. F/17/1.
4. *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 May 1996.
5. *Letters I*, p. 351.

Biographical Sketch

1. Collingwood, 1898, pp. 12–13
2. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
3. *Letters I*, p. 6; Collingwood, 1898, p. 23.
4. Collingwood, 1898, p. 30.
5. *Diaries III*, p. 40.
6. Hare, p. 169.
7. Letters to Archdeacon Dodgson, quoted in Collingwood, 1898, p. 29.
8. Letters from Frances Jane Dodgson to her sister Lucy, quoted in *Int & Rec*, p. 8.
9. Cohen, 1995, p. 32.
10. *Letters I*, p. 146.
11. Dedicatory poem to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, *Collected Works*, p. 459.

12. *Diaries II*, p. 12.
13. *Diaries I*, pp. 110–11.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Chapter 1: A Necessary Otherness

1. See e.g. *Letters I*, pp. 467, 536, 571; *II*, pp. 845, 887.
2. See e.g. *Int & Rec*, pp. 8–9; *Letters I*, pp. 53–5.
3. See e.g. *Letters I*, pp. 467, 607; *II*, p. 1104.
4. *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, July 1890, p. 254; *Illustrated News*, 4 April 1891, p. 435
5. See p. 12–13, 136–7.
6. Letter in Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. A/7/4.
7. Private diary of T. Vere Bayne, held at Christ Church, Oxford.
8. See e.g. *Int & Rec*, p. 69.
9. Anonymous poem in *Punch*, quoted in Collingwood, 1898, p. 357.
10. See *Letters II*, p. 1081.
11. See e.g. *Letters I*, pp. 26–7; *Diaries II*, pp. 72–3; *Collected Works*, pp. 721–2, 986–98.
12. Collingwood, 1898, pp. 109, 265, 389, 391.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 19–20.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 388.
19. *Letters I*, p. 325; *II*, p. 981.
20. *Int & Rec*, p. 208.
21. See e.g. *Diaries I*, pp. 50–56; *II*, p. 119.
22. Collingwood, 1898, p. 102.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
24. Dodgson's close friends Vere Bayne and Thomas Prout and his superior Henry Liddell, to name but the three closest at hand.
25. *Diaries IV/V*, *passim*.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 360.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 367.
29. *Letters I*, p. 595.

30. See *Letters I*, pp. 385, 525; *Letters II*, p. 781.
31. *Letters II*, p. 989.
32. Collingwood, 1898, p. 109.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 270, 413.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 30.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 266, 271, 390.
36. *Int & Rec*, p. 16.
37. Collingwood, 1898, p. 229.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
39. See his letter to Menella Dodgson, Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. DFC.F/17/2.
40. Collingwood, 1898, p. ix.
41. See e.g. Liddon, 1979.
42. Isa Bowman, *The Story of Lewis Carroll, as Told by the Real Alice in Wonderland*; Enid Shawyer (née Stevens), letter to the *Observer*, 14 February 1954, reproduced in *Int & Rec*, pp. 90, 126–7.
43. Bowman, in *Int & Rec*, p. 97.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–6.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 93.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 96–7.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
50. See *Letters II*, pp. 812–13, 820.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
52. Collingwood, 1898, pp. 401–2; *Int & Rec*, p. 249.
53. *Int & Rec*, pp. 124, 163, 186.
54. Edith Alice Maitland, ‘Childish Memories of Lewis Carroll, by One of His Alices’, reproduced in *Int & Rec*, p. 181.
55. ‘J.B.’, ‘Lewis Carroll at Oxford’, *Academy*, 22 January 1898, reproduced in *Int & Rec*, p. 69.
56. Enid Shawyer (née Stevens), ‘More Recollections of Lewis Carroll’, reproduced in *Int & Rec*, p. 128. See also e.g. *Int & Rec*, pp. 196–8.
57. Gertrude Thomson, ‘Lewis Carroll: A Sketch by an Artist-Friend’, reproduced in *Int & Rec*, p. 235.
58. Beatrice Hatch, ‘Lewis Carroll’, *Strand Magazine*, April 1898, reproduced in *Int & Rec*, p. 109.

59. See e.g. *Collected Works*, pp. 811–12, 1026–36.
60. Ruth Waterhouse (née Gamlen), in *Int & Rec*, pp. 160–61.
61. See e.g. *Int & Rec*, p. 139.
62. *Letters I*, p. 479
63. *Letters II*, pp. 812–13.
64. Ellen Terry, *Memoirs*, quoted in *Int & Rec*, p. 240.
65. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/lewiscarroll/message/1173>; see *Letters I*, pp. 488, 605; *II*, p. 940; Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. D/1/45/2.
66. Hatch, in *Int & Rec*, p. 102.
67. Quoted in Hudson, p.8.
68. Harry Furniss, ‘Recollections of Lewis Carroll’, *Strand Magazine*, January 1908, reproduced in *Int & Rec*, pp. 223–4.
69. *Letters II*, pp. 753–4.
70. *Letters II*, p. 756.
71. *Letters I*, pp. 578–80.
72. Furniss, in *Int & Rec*, pp. 222, 227.
73. William Tuckwell, *Reminiscences of Oxford*, 1900, quoted in *Int & Rec*, pp. 58–9.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
75. Collingwood, 1899, quoted in *Int & Rec*, p. 21.
76. Alice Hargreaves (née Liddell), ‘Alice’s Recollections of Carrollian Days, as Told to Her Son’, *Cornhill Magazine*, 73, July 1932, reproduced in *Int & Rec*, pp. 83–8.

Chapter 2: The Freudians and the Apologists

1. Among Reed’s eclectic collection of credits is the screenplay for the 1922 film *Potter’s Clay* (co-adapted with his wife Hetty Spiers from their novel), which starred the 73-year-old Ellen Terry – a connection which may be of interest in the light of some of Reed’s references to Terry in *The Life of Lewis Carroll*. (Reviewers tended to the view that Terry’s acting was the one good thing about the film: see www.imdb.com).
2. Letter of 10 March 1932 from Menella Dodgson to Falconer Madan, private collection.
3. Reed, pp. 10–11.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 9n.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 63–5.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 64, 109.

8. Collingwood, 1898, p. 367.
9. Reed, p. 90.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 89–90.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 37–8.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
16. See Cohen, 1995, pp. 311, 314, 554n.
17. Anthony Goldschmidt, 'Alice in Wonderland Psycho-Analysed', *New Oxford Outlook*, 1932, reproduced in Phillips, p. 332.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 331.
19. Hudson, p. xi; obituary of Derek Hudson, *The Times*, 3 November 2003.
20. Compare the celebrated mock-Freudian lecture given by 'Dr Emil Busch of Frankfurt' – in reality Balliol undergraduate George Edinger, sporting a lavish beard and German accent – at Oxford Town Hall in 1922 in Jones, pp. 273–4.
21. William Empson, 'Some Versions of the Pastoral', 1935, reproduced in Phillips, pp. 401, 416, 419.
22. Phillips, pp. 333, 334, 341.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 348, 364.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 392.
25. All quotes from Lennon, pp. 186–91.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
27. Collingwood, 1898, p. 365.
28. Lennon, p. 192.
29. Edward Wakeling, 'Two Letters from Lorina to Alice', *Jabberwocky*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 91–3.
30. Letter from Alexander Taylor to Menella Dodgson, 3 July 1950, Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. F/2/3/16.
31. Taylor, 1952, p. v.
32. See *Collected Works*, pp. 869, 875–6.
33. Taylor, pp. 33–4.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
35. Cohen, 1995, pp. 375.
36. Virginia Woolf, *The Moment and Other Essays*, 1948, quoted in Phillips, p. 78.

37. Correspondence between Falconer Madan and C.H.W. and Menella Dodgson, private collection.
38. Green, 1953, Preface.
39. Roger Lancelyn Green, letter to *The Times*, 3 February 1982.
40. Green, 1953, Preface.
41. Letter from Stuart Collingwood to Menella Dodgson, Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. DFC.F/17/2.
42. Green, 1953, pp. 151–2.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 149–50, 151.
44. Batey, p. 20.
45. Roger Lancelyn Green, ‘My Name Is Alice’, *Sunday Times Magazine*, 7 April 1963.
46. *Letters I*, p. 607.
47. Hudson, p. 20.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 188–9.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 190–92.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 272–3.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

Chapter 3: The Myth and the Millennium

1. Philip Dodgson Jaques, letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, 12 July 1966.
2. Dennis Potter, letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, 15 July 1966.
3. Gattegno, p. 96.
4. Clark, 1979, p. 142.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
7. See <http://lewiscarroll.cc/tls2.html>.
8. Cohen, 1982.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Bakewell, 1996, pp. xvi, 149.
12. Thomas, 1996, p. 288.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 251, 256.
14. Bakewell, pp. xvii, 207.
15. Cohen, 1995, pp. xxi, 194, 460, 462.
16. *Ibid.*, p. xx.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 224.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 193, 231, 530.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 462.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 462.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 462.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
23. *Letters I*, p. 607; *II*, p. 674.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 505.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 342.
26. *Diaries IV*, pp. 213–15.
27. Cohen, 1995, p. 100.
28. Margaret L. Woods, 'Oxford in the Seventies', *Fortnightly Review*, no. 150 (1941), reproduced (in part) in *Int & Rec*, pp. 198–9.
29. Cohen, 1995, p. 101.
30. Letter in the Salisbury Archive at Hatfield House, cat. no: 3M/DXiii/101.
31. Cohen, 1995, p. 100.
32. MS Diary, Vol. 5, British Library MS Add 54342.
33. *Diaries III*, p. 83.
34. *Diaries IV*, p. 299*n*.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 65*n*.
37. Quoted in Brooker, pp. 55–6.

Chapter 4: Photographing Angels

1. Cohen, 1995, p. 340.
2. Hudson, pp. 268–9.
3. Tennyson, p. 3.
4. Ashby-Sterry, p. 102.
5. Ormond, Jones, Newall and Read *et al.*, p. 203.
6. Pearsall, p. 357.

7. Quoted in Hugues Lebailly, 'Lewis Carroll, Eminent Ruskinian', in Clark Amor, 1998.
8. Poe (ed. Griswold), Vol. 1, p. xxx; Ingram, pp. 136–8.
9. Higonnet, p. 132.
10. *Collected Works*, p. 861.
11. See Gernsheim, especially plates 25, 33 and 43.
12. *Diaries III*, pp. 107–15.
13. Cohen (ed.), 1980, pp. 34–9. Items described in the auction catalogue as a 'large bathing dress' and a 'large cotton nightdress' were still in Dodgson's collection of photographic costumes at the time of his death (Stern, p. 92).
14. Lebailly, in Clark Amor, 1998.
15. *Collected Works*, pp. 849, 863.
16. *Diaries I*, p. 79.
17. Hudson, pp. 256–7; Giuliano 1982, p. 13.
18. *Letters I*, pp. 457, 479*n*.
19. *Diaries V*, p. 53; *Letters II*, p. 1027.
20. Thomas, 1979, p. 125; Collingwood, 1898, p. 229.
21. *Letters II*, pp. 1016, 1040.
22. *Letters I*, p. 536; *II*, p. 619.
23. *Letters II*, pp. 982, 1018–19.
24. *Letters I*, p. 308*n*.; Cohen, 1995, p. 462; *Int & Rec*, pp. 56–7.
25. Cohen, 1995, p. 531.

Chapter 5: The Faculty

1. Christ Church dates its foundation from 1546 but was first instituted in 1525 by Cardinal Wolsey, whose lower-class roots were a byword of his time.
2. William Tuckwell, cited in Lennon, p. 59.
3. Kenny (ed.), pp. lvi–lviii.
4. *Letters I*, pp. 26–7.
5. *Collected Works*, pp. 721–2.
6. *Collected Works*, pp. 986–98.
7. *St James's Gazette*, 11 March 1898.
8. *Letters I*, p. 29.
9. *Diaries I*, p. 61.
10. E.L. Shute, 'Lewis Carroll as Artist', *Cornhill Magazine*, November 1932, reprinted in *Int & Rec*, p. 56; *Letters I*, p. 202.

11. Collingwood, 1898, pp. 8, 131.
12. Thomas, pp. 39–40.
13. Ivor Davies, ‘Archdeacon Dodgson,’ *Jabberwocky*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 46–9; Thomas, pp. 39–40.
14. Lennon, p. 175.
15. *Letters I*, p. 4.
16. Clark Amor, 1990, pp. 11, 15.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 19.
18. Collingwood, 1898, p. 55.
19. *Int & Rec*, p. 33.
20. *Diaries I*, p. 79.
21. Clark Amor, 1990, p. 22.
22. *Collected Works*, pp. 700, 704–5.
23. Shaberman, 1995, pp. 16–17.
24. Collingwood, 1898, p. 131.
25. *Diaries I*, p. 105.
26. *Diaries II*, p. 54.
27. Quoted in Lennon, p. 144.
28. Cohen, 1995, p. 330.
29. *Diaries II*, p. 119.
30. *Letters II*, p. 618.
31. *Sylvie and Bruno* (Ch. 2), in *Collected Works*, pp. 290–91.
32. *Letters I*, p. 28.
33. *Diaries I*, p. 134.
34. *Diaries I*, pp. 50–56, 77–8.
35. *Diaries II*, pp. 67, 73–7.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–15.
37. Kenny (ed.), pp. lxi–lxii and *passim*.
38. *Diaries II*, p. 129.

Chapter 6: After the Verdict: A Summary of the Evidence

1. Woolf (ed.), pp. 9, 83–136 *passim*.
2. Letter in Dodgson Family Collection, cat. No. A/7/4.
3. ‘Lewis Carroll: An Interview with His Biographer’ *Westminster Budget*, 9 December 1898, reprinted in *Int & Rec*, pp. 10–13.

4. Gernsheim, p. v.
5. Green (ed.), Preface.
6. *Int & Rec*, p. 11.
7. Letter in Dodgson Family Collection, cat.no. F/17/2.
8. Document in Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. F/17/1.
9. Letter of 10 March 1932 from Menella Dodgson to Falconer Madan, private collection.

Chapter 7: 'Mistery of Pain'

1. *Diaries IV*, pp. 67, 78, 103, 107–8.
2. *Diaries V*, pp. 152, 165.
3. *Diaries IV*, p. 158.
4. *Diaries III*, p. 142.
5. *Letters I*, pp. 602–3.
6. Cohen, 1995, p. 225.
7. *Diaries IV*, pp. 136, 141.
8. *Letters I*, p. 602.
9. Clark Amor, 1990, p. 22.
10. *Diaries V*, pp. 164–5.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 166, 191, 197.
12. Green, 1953, Vol. 1, pp. 151–2.
13. Cohen, 1995, p. xxi; Bakewell, p. 110.
14. *Diaries IV*, pp. 321–2.
15. *Collected Works*, pp. 875–6.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 849–52.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 863–7.
18. 'The fruits were rotting in their place, / The flowers were fading *where we lay*' [emphasis added], *College Rhymes*, summer 1862. These lines were rewritten to less explicit effect in later reprintings.
19. Cohen, 1995, p. 224.
20. *Collected Works*, pp. 856–60.
21. Cohen, 1995, p. 219.

Chapter 8: The Broad and the High

1. *Diaries I*, p. 101.
2. Stirling, p. 191; Thompson, pp. 254–5; Gordon, p. 206.

3. Gordon, pp. 77, 126–7.
4. Kenny, pp. xviii, 84–5.
5. Thompson, p. 170.
6. Pearsall, p. 452.
7. Stirling, p. 192; Cohen, 1995, pp. 512–13; Gordon, p. 63.
8. Ray (ed.), Vol. 2, pp. 641–2.
9. Gordon, pp. 66–70.
10. Germain Lavie, *The Westminster Play, Its Actors and Its Visitors, by an Old Westminster* (1855), quoted in Clark, 1981, p. 31.
11. All quotations in this section from Bill and Mason, pp. 61–83.
12. Thomas, p. 138; Shaberman, p. 64.
13. Anon., *The Masque of Balliol*, circulated c. 1881; *Vanity Fair*, 30 January 1875, quoted in Cohen, 1995, p. 508.
14. *Diaries II*, p. 43.
15. Shaberman, 1982.
16. Cohen, 1995, pp. 67, 513; Bakewell, p. 84.
17. Bakewell, p. 129.
18. Gordon, p. 143.
19. Gordon, pp. 103–4; see also *Letters I*, p. 40, for an illustration of Dodgson in a similar vein.
20. *Diaries I*, p. 77, 79.
21. *Diaries III*, p. 23.
22. See e.g. *Diaries III*, pp. 20–21; V, p. 188.
23. *Diaries II*, p. 116; *III*, p. 74.
24. *Diaries III*, p. 59.
25. *Collected Works*, pp. 322, 809–12.
26. *Collected Works*, pp. 86–9; Phillips, pp. 418–19.
27. *Diaries IV*, p. 103.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 139–40.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 68–9; private conversation with Anne Clark.
32. Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. F/17/1.
33. *Diaries IV*, p. 185.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 204–5.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 206–9.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
38. Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. F/17/1.
39. *Diaries III*, p. 59.
40. *Diaries IV*, pp. 218, 233, 242.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 257–9.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 263–5.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 265–6.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 268–9
45. *Ibid.*, p. 299.
46. Thackeray, pp. 62.
47. *Letters I*, p. 177.
48. Thackeray, pp. 66.
49. *Diaries V*, pp. 165–6.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 188, 242–3.

Chapter 9: The Unreal Alice

1. Manley, p. 4; Batey, p. 20.
2. *Diaries V*, p. 180.
3. Cohen, 1995, p. 101.
4. Letter in Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. F/17/2.
5. Hudson, p. 192; Cohen, 1995, p. 342.
6. Cohen, 1995, p. 100.
7. *Diaries IV*, p. 115.
8. *The Theatre*, April 1887, quoted in Hudson, pp. 209–10.
9. *Diaries IV*, pp. 141–2.
10. *Letters I*, p. 607.
11. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, Introduction, p. 17, Ch. 10.
12. *Diaries V*, p. 74.
13. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, Foreword by Mary Jean St Clair, p. 8.
14. Letter from Dean Liddell to Alice dated March 1885, in the Christ Church archive (until 2001).
15. *Letters II*, p. 876; *Diaries VIII*, p. 432.
16. Taylor, p. 197.

17. Gordon, p. 92.
18. *Int & Rec*, pp. 84–7.
19. Zeepvat, pp. 90–2.
20. Edward Wakeling, ‘Two Letters from Lorina to Alice’, *Jabberwocky*, vol. 21 no. 4, pp. 91–3 (quotes the full text of the letters).
21. *Diaries IV*, pp. 115.
22. British Library MS No. 11779 B5 (3).
23. Gordon, p. 85.

Chapter 10: Bitter Memory

1. Lennon, pp. 130–1
2. Letter of 28 April 1933 from Alice to her son Caryl, in the Christ Church archive (until 2001).
3. Edward Wakeling, ‘Two Letters from Lorina to Alice’, *Jabberwocky*, vol. 21 no. 4, p. 92.
4. *Collected Works*, p. 279.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 272, 274.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 332.
7. ‘The New Belfry’, *Collected Works*, pp. 1026–36.
8. ‘The Blank Cheque’, *Collected Works*, pp. 1056–7.
9. *Diaries VIII*, pp. 514–15.
10. Shaberman, 1982, p. 5; Shaberman, 1995, pp. 65–6.
11. *Letters II*, p. 870.
12. *Letters II*, p. 697.
13. Gordon, p. 21.
14. *Letters II*, p. 873; Cohen, 1995, p. 104.
15. Stirling, pp. 191–2.
16. Tennyson, p. 577.
17. Gordon, p. 231.
18. Lennon, p. 192; Hudson, p. 201.

Chapter 11: ‘A Prisoner in His Cell’

1. *Diaries VI*, p. 139.
2. Lennon, p. 174.
3. *Letters I*, pp. 463, 586; see also the preface to *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, *Collected Works*, pp. 463–4.

4. *The Theatre*, April 1887, quoted in Hudson, pp. 209–10.
5. *Letters I*, p. 607.
6. T.H. Bayly, 'The Mistletoe Bough', in Turner, pp. 189–90; *Collected Works*, pp. 687–98; *Letters II*, p. 1113.
7. *Letters II*, p. 847.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 869.
9. *Letters I*, p. 548.
10. *Collected Works*, pp. 1080–81.
11. *Letters II*, p. 1104.
12. *Diaries VII*, p. 240.
13. Cohen (ed.), 1980, pp. 30, 40, 43.
14. *Letters I*, p. 308; *II*, pp. 806, 982.
15. *Letters I*, p. 559; *II*, p. 1035.
16. *Letters II*, p. 772.
17. 'Marriage Service', unpublished essay by Dodgson, dated 1877.
18. *Letters II*, pp. 977–8.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 964.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 1040.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 1064–5.
22. Collingwood 1898, p. 231; lines by Margaret Fuller Ossoli, quoted by Hudson, p. 307.
23. *Collected Works*, pp. 253, 459, 840.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 1060.
25. *Letters I*, pp. 578–81.
26. See *ibid.*, pp. 337–43.
27. *Letters II*, pp. 806, 947; *Int & Rec*, p. 226.
28. *Int & Rec*, p. 130.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 89–94, 248.
30. *Letters II*, pp. 971–4.
31. *Diaries IX*, pp. 98–9.
32. *Letters II*, pp. 773, 1042.
33. Private journal of T. Vere Bayne, at Christ Church, Oxford.
34. *Letters II*, p. 1100.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 955–6.
36. Taped reminiscences of Dorothy Burch.

37. *Letters II*, pp. 962–3.
38. *Diaries IX*, p. 148.
39. *Letters II*, p. 1088.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 1155–6.
41. *Int & Rec*, p. 236.
42. Will of C.L. Dodgson, in Dodgson Family Collection, cat. no. A/7/3.
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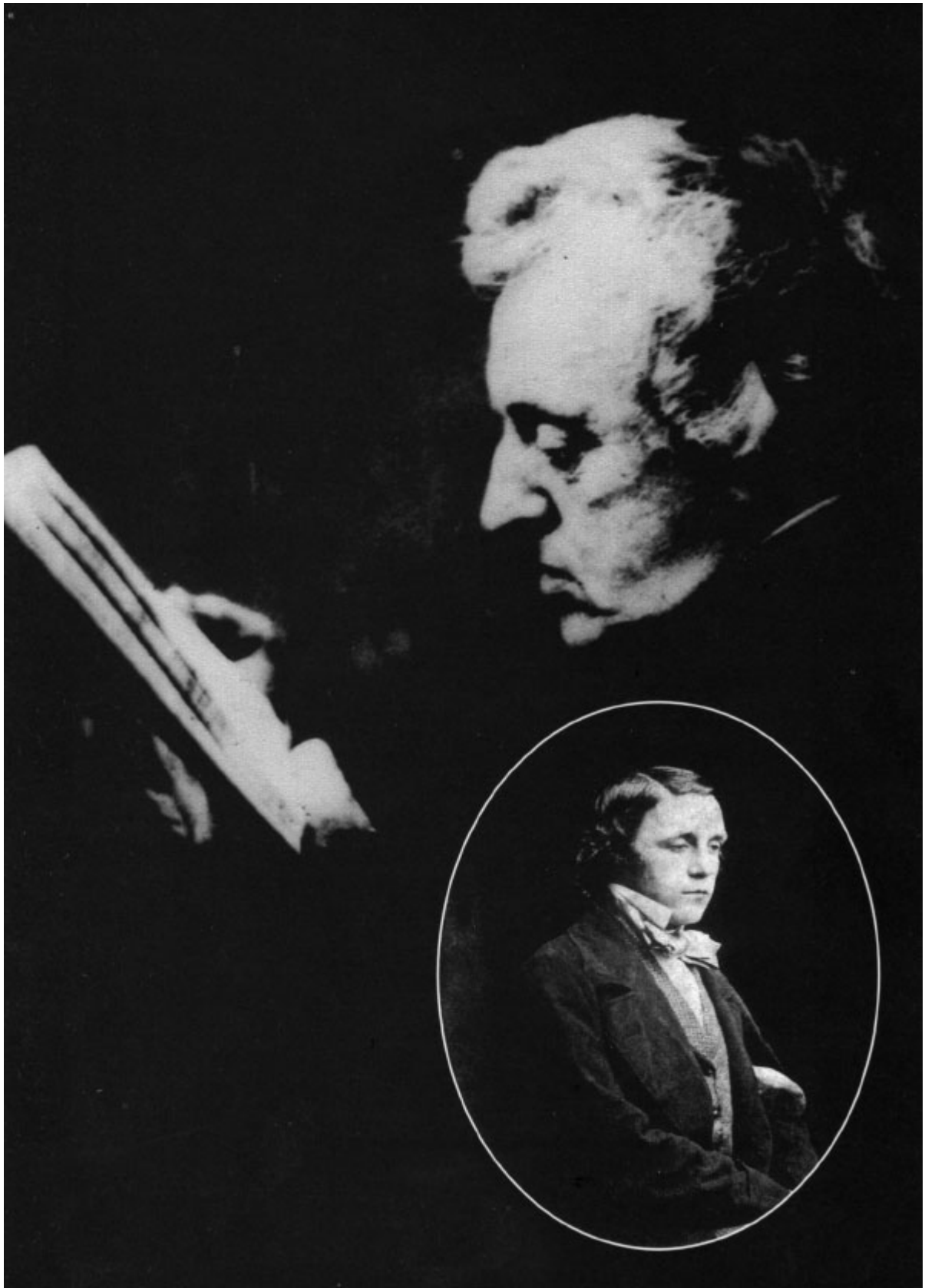
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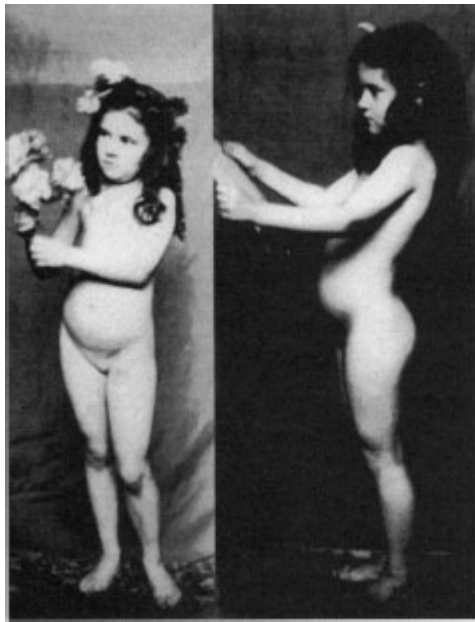


A photograph by Charles of his father, Archdeacon Dodgson, a man of 'decided opinions'

The young Dodgson, self-consciously fashionable would-be man of the world (*private collection*)



A Victorian birthday card (*private collection*)



Freddie Cowen, one of Julia Margaret Cameron's soft-focus and pouting child nudes – photograph entitled 'Cupid', c. 1873



The ubiquitous, innocent cult of the Victorian child nude

Katie Morrison, depicted in a typical Victorian family album, c. 1874

Mainstream child studies published by Schenk of New York, 1880



Louey Webb, whose 'beautifully formed' body Dodgson admired (*Lovett Collection*)



Wilfred Dodgson, executor of his brother's estate



Stuart Collingwood, Charles's nephew and first biographer, who may have destroyed four volumes of his uncle's diary (*Dodgson Family Collection, Surrey History Centre*)

Cut paper in half

Vol-8 Page 72. Also not improved
by being laid up

Vol 8. Page 92. L.C. learns from Dr. Haddell that he is supposed to be using the children as a means of paying court to the Foreman - He is also supposed to be courting 'ma -

Nel = 11 Page 110 - is about
S. H. 8 -

Does any one know what the
"lms men" with Lord Newry "was
which put L.C. out of the
Libello got Grace"

Lesdunes

Louise (1841) married to Skene

Feb = 1874 - died ^{at} 2930

Alice was born May 1852 -

Edith died after months in
June 1876 ^{engaged to Henry Har}
Court. Also his ^{son} ~~son~~ ^{son} ~~son~~

Rhoda (unmarked) 80 all alive

"Violet Constance Ledbell" (unmarried)

Look to the Parish for 4927-

Red Corn Apples - (in 1927)

Wanda L address, 21. Cadogan Court
S.W. 5.

Mr H's son lives at Caffetto - A+

Mr Haywards' address is

The Branches. Westerham. Per.

Branche:

Alcibi's son C.L. Mangreaves died on

Nov 26th 1955.

born 1867

m. 1929 Madeleine de Brigan G.
Lawellon Palmer CB of Beverly Hills, 1811
Children: 1 daughter.

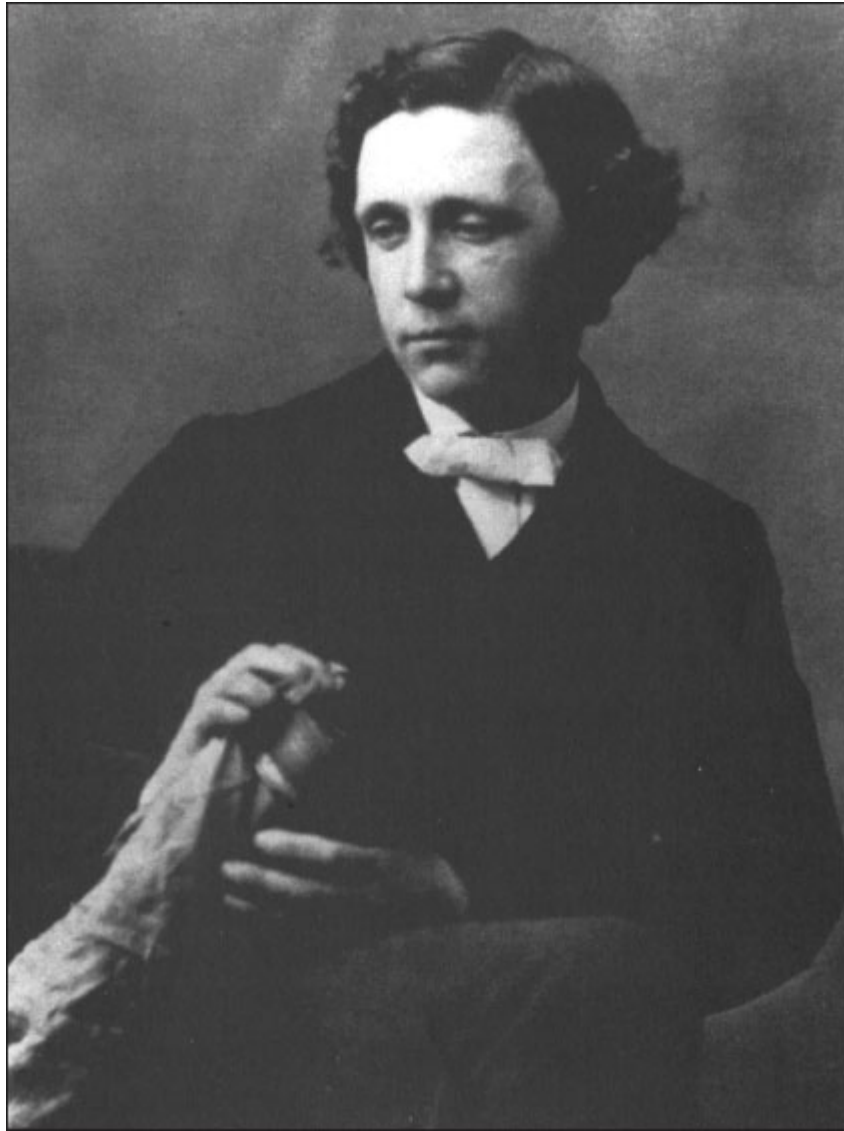
Dfc F 5.17/1 ✓



One of several adult nudes owned by Dodgson which belie the myth that he had no interest in sexually mature women



‘My Lady/Lady Muriel’: the two faces of Lorina Liddell



Dodgson in the midst of his private pain, photographed three months before the crisis of June 1863



Dean Liddell's wife, Lorina, mother of Alice



Henry George Liddell, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford



Dodgson's photograph of the 'famous three' Liddell girls, Edith, Ina and Alice



Alice Liddell, whose real significance in Dodgson's life has been overstated for so long



Ina, the eldest Liddell daughter, in her teens



The mature Dodgson, whose hunger for the companionship of women was a near obsession



'Darling Isa' Bowman, Dodgson's actress friend (*Lovett Collection*)



Constance Burch, one of Dodgson's last woman-friends (Mrs *G.E.B. Skwirczynska*)

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